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digest

CLASSIC READS

*17 Nostalgic Stories
From the Archives*

**From Street Kids to
Chess Champions**

PAGE 114

BEHIND THE ROYAL SMILE

**A Glimpse into a Young
Queen Elizabeth II's World**

PAGE 46

**Trapped
Beneath a Burning Tanker**

PAGE 128

"If I Could Go to School Again"

PAGE 56





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TWIN POWER

The fascinating connection between identical twins Craig and Brenton Gurney defies current scientific explanation.



A MIRACLE OF MERMAIDS

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"Dear God," pleaded the victim, "let it finish me off quickly!"



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- HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCES ● DRAMA IN REAL LIFE
- INSPIRATIONAL MOMENTS ● TRUE CRIME ENCOUNTERS



Contents

JANUARY 2019



▲ P. | 28

March 1933

14 THREE DAYS TO SEE

The gift of sight opens up a vivid world of imagination for the famed writer. HELEN KELLER

August 1998

20 WALTER MIKAC'S MESSAGE OF HOPE

In the aftermath of a terrible tragedy, a bereaved father shares a story of courage and love. WALTER MIKAC

June 1988

28 UNFORGETTABLE SNOW WHITE

When Snow White met Walt Disney they lived happily ever after. JOHN CULHANE

April 1999

34 HERE COMES A CYBER MUM

Just because the kids leave home doesn't mean that you can't reach them - anywhere.

LIAO YU HUI FROM THE UNITED DAILY NEWS

February 1998

38 LOST IN THE CORAL SEA

The skipper's determination was their only chance of survival. TRACEY AUBIN

October 1957

46 WHAT IT TAKES TO BE ROYAL

Behind the pomp is a newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II facing up to an enormous challenge. FRANCIS DRAKE AND KATHARINE DRAKE

May 1963

56 IF I COULD GO TO SCHOOL AGAIN

Forget maths and history. Let's be taught ping pong and how to laugh more. DON HEROLD

July 1994

64 THE CASE OF THE MISSING KEYS

It appeared to be the perfect crime. Only one thing was unaccounted for. DAVID MOLLER



Contents

JANUARY 2019

- December 1964**
- 74 THE BEAR THAT CAME TO SUPPER**
What would you do if you met a bear in the woods?
ROBERT FRANKLIN LESLIE
- February 1949**
- 82 TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA**
One doesn't have to be rich to be a true gentleman. A. J. CRONIN
- August 1969**
- 88 WHAT YOU'RE MISSING WHEN YOU'RE NOT LISTENING**
Surround yourself with sound.
JOHN KORD LAGEMANN
- December 1998**
- 94 REMINISCENCES BY THE KITCHEN STOVE**
Happiness radiates from childhood memories. YOU JIN
- April 1968**
- 100 HOW RICH CAN YOU BE?**
Ownership is not that simple.
JEAN BELL MOSLEY
- November 1999**
- 104 A QUESTION OF TRUST**
A plain white cotton handkerchief has myriad uses.
SHERRY HEMMAN HOGAN
- June 1989**
- 114 FROM STREET KIDS TO ROYAL KNIGHTS**
The boys were pawns in the game of life until they discovered chess. JO COUDERT
- May 1956**
- 122 THE CURIOUS CUSTOM OF GOING STEADY**
When teenagers like each other, there are certain rituals to follow. CAMERON SHIPP
- August 1991**
- 128 TRAPPED BENEATH A BLAZING TANKER**
A young girl is pinned underneath a burning petrol tanker. JAMES HUTCHISON
-
- REGULARS**
-
- 4 Editor's Letter
6 Staff Picks
8 Testimonial
27, 73, 81 Points to Ponder
45, 93, 127 Personal Glimpses
99, 140 Quotable Quotes
-
- HUMOUR**
-
- 10 Laughter, the Best Medicine
60 Life's Like That
110 All in a Day's Work



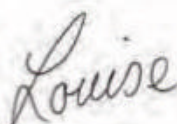
Editor's Note

Stories to Treasure

'WHAT MAKES A READER'S DIGEST ARTICLE DIFFERENT?'

For me, the best Digest articles have a timeless relevance. They feel both familiar and fresh. Our annual Classic Reads is filled with stories that leave an impression and are relatable. In 'A Question of Trust' (page 104), Sherry Hemman Hogan reminisces about her father and his habit of carrying a handkerchief. Her father's story could easily have been about my own father. Theirs was an era of simple rules, and one rule was to always carry a handkerchief in a trouser pocket. My dad's handkerchief was there in times of sadness, injury and sickness but also when I needed to carry treasures found on bushwalks and prevent sauce stains on T-shirts. I learnt to iron on Dad's handkerchiefs – making sure they were perfectly flat to fit neatly in his pocket. These simple pieces of cloth were masculine, useful, and a clear mark of a gentleman. Who'd have thought a simple story about a handkerchief would make such an impression? The simple humanity of a handkerchief – it's the sort of story you'd only find in Reader's Digest.

This year's Classic Reads has stories to rally the human spirit, making us connect through our shared struggles, laughter, victories, joy and even tears. So, as you settle down with the



LOUISE WATERSON
Group Editor





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Share antics of unique pets or wildlife in up to 300 words.

Reminisce

Share the tales of an event from your past that made a huge impact in 100-500 words.

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Do you have an inspiring or life-changing tale to tell? Submissions must be true, unpublished, original and 800-1000 words – see website for more information.

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TRAPPED BENEATH A BLAZING TANKER

Surrounded by flames, a brave firefighter is a young girl's only hope of rescue.

● DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



THE CASE OF THE MISSING KEYS

With no evidence, what will it take to identify a clever, cold-blooded killer?

● TRUE CRIME ENCOUNTERS

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Classics Never Age

These stories are too good to tell just once. Here are our favourites



I had no idea that dating etiquette in the 1950s was so complicated. **‘The Curious Custom of Going Steady’** looks at the delicate intricacies of this most serious business, and lays down the challenge to think about what we treasure in relationships today.

ELEANOR WATSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

*I love ‘**From Street Kids to Royal Knights**’ because it is about believing in yourself. It shows how self-confidence beats negativity from others and proves that no matter what, or how little, is expected from you by society, no one can dismiss you or your abilities if you have faith in yourself.*

MICHAEL CRAWFORD, DIGITAL EDITOR

I read **‘Three Days to See’** a few months ago and it is still with me. I’ve taken up Helen Keller’s challenge and I’m (very easily) marvelling at the beauty in things and people I would have otherwise taken for granted.

VICTORIA POLZOT, ASSOCIATE EDITOR



***‘The Bear That Came to Supper’** intrigued me.*

Weighing in at 225 kilograms, Canadian black bear ‘Bosco’ was no cuddly teddy. I’m not sure how truly comfortable I’d be with a pungent wild animal that could knock me out with a playful swipe of its front paw.

MELANIE EGAN, CHIEF SUBEDITOR

It’s always such a pleasure to journey through the decades via the RD humour pages and note that, while we still experience many of the same daily struggles, disappointments and frustrations, our capacity for playfulness and ‘seeing the funny side’ remains as strong as ever. That gives me hope for the future.

GREG BARTON, DIGITAL CONTENT MANAGER

‘What It Takes to be Royal’ ... Well, a lot of stamina for a start. Our classic feature from 1957 is a window into the young Queen Elizabeth II’s world. Already clearly evident are her fortitude, impeccable dress sense and politely resolute decorum. Qualities that will later see her celebrate her Diamond Jubilee (65 years) and foster the collective strength of the Commonwealth. God save the Queen!

HUGH HANSON, ART DIRECTOR





Testimonials

SMALL MAGAZINE, WIDE REACH

APRIL 1937

Escape From Prison

A little magazine
provides an outlet
for prisoners
in Ohio State
Penitentiary

BY NUMBER 57419

IT IS NIGHT AND I CAN'T SLEEP.

A sliver of light from outside my cell throws hideous patterns on the walls. Faint noises of the free world beyond the prison reach my ears. I want to cry out, to tear the bars loose. Then my gaze falls on a frayed little magazine which a neighbour had tossed over just before 'lights out'. And in the Reader's Digest I find relief from my wild thoughts.

To many of the 4000 men here, your magazine means as much as it has meant to me during the past eight years. Locked in the cells from 4.30pm to 7am, they must have some escape from grim monotony. Lights are turned out at 9.15, but far into sleepless nights they contrive to read the Reader's Digest by the trickle of light from the corridors.

Prisoners are most discerning readers. Slow to praise, they are quick to criticise a book or magazine. Among them, no other periodical has such an enthusiastic and appreciative following as has the Reader's Digest. It is amazing to see how carefully each issue is preserved. As it travels through the huge cell blocks, hours are spent in patching and re-patching leaves, so that not a single page will be lost. Three-, six-, nine-year-old copies are still in circulation. On the cover

and inside pages there will often be found in some fellow con's handwriting, 'Read and Pass On', 'Swell Article', 'True! True! True!'

There are many here who are making determined comebacks. As good food for starved minds, as a fountain of perpetual inspiration, and as a means of keeping up with the progressing world, your magazine helps tremendously.

The key to reformation is the mind.

In this, the wide variety of articles, easy to comprehend, has contributed more towards making a so-called hardened criminal pause and think than have countless committees, legislative acts, stiff sentences and correctional cells. After all, prison is not just to punish. Is it not also to untangle antisocial

viewpoints, to correct character, to reform, to rehabilitate, to set men back on the road to decent citizenship? And in this, the Reader's Digest plays a truly noble part, helping to salvage from society's wholesale dumping ground more than one soul given up for lost.

Is it any wonder, then, that I and some 4000 others on these prison tiers are sincerely grateful to the Reader's Digest? For to us, this little magazine brings genuine escape. **R**

“
***On the cover
and inside pages
there will often
be found in some
fellow con's
handwriting,
'Read and
Pass On'***
”

Laughter

THE BEST MEDICINE

1940s

The nurse beckoned to one of a group of expectant fathers at the hospital and announced, "You have a fine son."

Another man immediately rushed up and complained, "What's the idea? I was here before he was!"

SOUTHERN TELEPHONE NEWS,
RD NOVEMBER 1947

A housewife was looking over the new maid's references. "Do you think you will settle down here?" she asked. "You seem to have left a good many places."

The girl smiled confidently. "Yes ma'am," she replied. "But I didn't leave any of them voluntarily."

TIT-BITS, RD APRIL 1948

It had been a terrible season for the local football team, and a friend was trying to cheer up the coach. "At least you've taught the boys good sportsmanship," he comforted. "They're certainly good losers."

"Good!" growled the coach. "Why, they're perfect!"

WOODMEN OF THE
WORLD MAGAZINE, RD FEBRUARY 1949

"For the last time," a husband shouted towards the bedroom, "are you ready to go?"

"For heaven's sake, be quiet," retorted his wife. "I've been telling you for the last hour that I'll be ready in a minute."

THE FURROW, RD FEBRUARY 1949

1950s

A man met a friend he hadn't seen for a long time. "Why George," he said, "you've changed! What's making you look so old?"

"Trying to keep young," said George.

"Trying to keep young?" queried the man.

"Yes," was the gloomy response, "nine of them."

THE WATCHMAN EXAMINER,
RD MARCH 1953

Sandy and Mac were having dinner together when, to Mac's disgust, Sandy calmly helped himself to the larger fish on the platter.

"Fine manners you've got, Sandy," Mac admonished. "If I'd been in your

place, I'd have taken the smaller fish."

"Well," replied Sandy with his mouth full, "you've got it!"

THE OUTSPAN, RD SEPTEMBER 1953

A drunk man who was wandering around Times Square finally went down into the subway at 42nd Street. About half an hour later he emerged at 44th Street and bumped into a friend who had been looking for him. "Where on earth have you been all this time?" the friend asked.

"Down in some guy's cellar," the drunk said. "And, boy, you should see the set of trains he has!"

JACK STERLING SHOW,
CBS, RD AUGUST 1958

1960s

The grocery assistant overheard two nuns debating as to which should drive back to the convent. One said, "You drive, Sister Luke, and I'll pray."

"What's the matter?" Sister Luke countered. "Don't you trust my praying?"

MRS RENÉ E. TREMBLAY IN *CATHOLIC DIGEST*, RD DECEMBER 1966

The office Christmas party seems to be declining in popularity. That's

understandable – who wants to smooch an electronic computer?

EARL WILSON, *HALL SYNDICATE*,
RD DECEMBER 1964

My great aunt particularly enjoys watching the musical programmes on TV.

One day we were watching a long-haired male rock 'n' roll group when she commented: "I certainly enjoy this music. But the girls get uglier every week."

LARRY RIVERA,
RD DECEMBER 1966

The city of San Francisco is trying to reduce the pigeon population by setting out cracked corn which has been treated with an antifertility substance. It constitutes a sort of

bird-control pill – or, if you prefer, Planned Pigeon-hood.

DICK HITT IN *DALLAS TIMES HERALD*,
RD JULY 1967

1970s

A fellow went to a psychiatrist and was diagnosed as a workaholic. He had to take a second job to pay for the therapy.

THE KIPLINGER MAGAZINE,
RD MAY 1979

1953

A ferry boat captain shouted down to the crew's quarters below deck, "Is there a mackintosh down there big enough to keep two young ladies warm?"

"No," came the booming answer, "but there's a MacPherson here who's willin' to try!"

BELL TELEPHONE NEWS
RD JANUARY 1953

THE BEST MEDICINE

A 12-year-old boy defines 'mixed emotions': "It's like hearing in the morning that school is closed because of a storm, and you are in bed with the flu."

F.M., RD AUGUST 1973

1980s

A man was applying for a job as a prison guard at a maximum security jail. The warden said, "Now these are real tough guys in here. Do you think you can handle it?"

"No problem," the applicant replied. "If they don't behave, out they go!"

JOEY ADAMS,

RD MAY 1988

"What a coincidence!" the wife said to her husband.

"You forgot my birthday and I forgot how to cook."

JAMES UNGER, RD MAY 1988

"Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"Opportunity."

"Can't be."

"Why not?"

"Opportunity knocks only once."

JOHN RINDONE, RD JUNE 1986

Boss: "Why are you late?"

Employee: "Because yesterday you told me to read my newspaper at home."

LAME EXCUSES, EDITED BY RENÉ

HILDBRAND, RD SEPTEMBER 1987

1990s

"I'm not saying you're fibbing, Michael," the mother said on encountering her son in the street when he should have been in class. "I'm just telling you I've never heard of schools giving time off for good behaviour."

EDWARD STEVENSON,

RD JULY 1991

Did you hear about the guy who is both a taxidermist and a veterinarian?

He has a sign on his door:

"Either way, you get your dog back."

BETH MACK,

RD JANUARY 1997

A grazier died and left the property to his only son. Twenty-four hours later, the bank foreclosed on it.

"Well," noted the son, "Dad did say the farm would be mine one day."

RON DENTINGER,

RD FEBRUARY 1997

1979

Walking into a crowded restaurant, a fellow caught the eye of the waiter and said, "You know it's been ten years since I came here."
"Don't blame me," the waiter snapped. "I'm working as fast as I can!"

N. MOCKRIDGE

RD MAY 1979

“There’s a new study that reveals that white wine may reduce the risk of heart attacks,” says Jay Leno. “What they don’t tell you is that it may increase the chance of pregnancy.”

THE JOKE BOOK (PETER HADDOCK),
RD JULY 1993

Overheard: “Things are still bad in the banking industry. The other day, a friend of mine went to the bank and asked the teller to check her balance. The guy leaned over and pushed her!”

TOM BLAIR, *SAN DIEGO
UNION-TRIBUNE*,
RD JULY 1993

2000s

The crowds were gathered on Mount Olympus to watch a football match between the gods and mortals. As the teams ran out on to the pitch, someone asked the manager of the gods, “Who’s that character that’s half human and half horse?”

“That’s our centaur forward,” he replied.

BRIAN ELLIOT, RD NOVEMBER 2001

A male patient called his dentist for an appointment. “Sorry,” said the dentist, “I have 18 cavities to fill.”

With that, the dentist put down the phone, picked up his golf bag and left the surgery.

TOMMY DOYLE, RD APRIL 2003

Joe’s wife bought a new line of expensive cosmetics after hearing that they would make her look years

younger. After applying the products, she asked her husband, “Darling, tell me honestly. What age would you say I am?”

Looking her over carefully, Joe replied, “Let me see. Judging by your skin, 20, your hair, 18 and your figure, 25.”

“Oh, you flatterer,” she gushed in delight. “Wait a minute,”

Joe warned. “I haven’t added them up yet.”

MARK SOMERVILLE,
RD APRIL 2003

The boss says to one of his staff, “We’ve got a vacancy. Your twin brother could fill it.”

“My twin brother?” replies the worker.

“Yes, the one I saw at the football match yesterday while you were at your uncle’s funeral.”

CHAYAN, RD MAY 2004

2002

In an interview, a plastic surgeon was asked if he’d ever done anything shocking.

“I don’t think so,” he replied.

“But I’ve certainly raised a few eyebrows.”

P. BACANIN
RD FEBRUARY 2002





MARCH 1933



Three Days to See

What would you look at if
you had just three days of sight?
Helen Keller, blind and deaf from
infancy, gives her answer

BY HELEN KELLER



I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound. Now and then, I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see.

Recently I asked a friend, who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied. *How was it possible*, I asked myself, *to walk for an hour through the woods and see nothing worthy of note?* I, who cannot see, find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch. I feel the delicate symmetry of a leaf. I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of a silver birch, or the rough, shaggy bark of a pine. In spring, I touch the branches of trees hopefully in search of a bud, the first sign of awakening nature after her winter's sleep.

Occasionally, if I am very fortunate, I place my hand gently on a small tree and feel the happy quiver of a bird in full song.

At times my heart cries out with longing to see all these things. If I can get so much pleasure from mere touch, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight? And I have imagined what I should most like to see if I were given the use of my eyes, say, for just three days.

I should divide the period into three

parts. On the first day, I should want to see the people whose kindness and companionship have made my life worth living.

I do not know what it is to see into the heart of a friend through that 'window of the soul', the eye. I can only 'see' through my fingertips the outline of a face. I can detect laughter, sorrow and many other obvious emotions. I know my friends from the feel of their faces.

How much easier, how much more satisfying it is for you who can see to grasp quickly the essential qualities of another person by watching the subtleties of expression, that quiver of a muscle, the flutter of a hand. But does it ever occur to you to use your sight to see into the inner nature of a friend? Do not most of you seeing people grasp casually the outward features of a face and let it go at that?

For instance, can you describe accurately the faces of five good friends? As an experiment, I have questioned husbands about the colour of the wives' eyes, and often they express embarrassed confusion and admit that they do not know.

Oh, the things I should see if I had the power of sight for just three days!

THE FIRST DAY WOULD BE A BUSY ONE. I should call to me all my dear friends and look long into their faces, imprinting upon my mind the outward evidence of the beauty that is within them. I should let my eyes rest,

too, on the face of a baby, so that I could catch a vision of the eager, innocent beauty which precedes the individual's consciousness of the conflicts which life develops.

I should like to see the books which have been read to me, and which have revealed to me the deepest channels of human life. And I should like to look into the loyal, trusting eyes of my dogs, the little Scottie and the stalwart Great Dane.

In the afternoon I should take a long walk in the woods and intoxicate my eyes on the beauties of the world of nature. And I should pray for the glory of a colourful sunset. *That night, I think, I should not be able to sleep.*

The next day I should arise with the dawn and see the thrilling miracle by which night is transformed into day. I should behold with awe the magnificent panorama of light with which the sun awakens the sleeping Earth.

This day I should devote to a hasty glimpse of the world, past and present. I should want to see the pageant of man's progress, and so I should go to the museums. There my eyes would see the condensed history of the Earth – animals and the races of men pictured in their native environment; gigantic carcasses of dinosaurs and

mastodons which roamed the Earth before man appeared, with his tiny stature and powerful brain, to conquer the animal kingdom.

My next stop would be the Museum of Art. I know well through my hands the sculptured gods and goddesses of the ancient Nile-land. I have felt copies of Parthenon friezes and I have sensed the rhythmic beauty of charging Athenian warriors. The gnarled, bearded features of Homer are dear to me, for he, too, knew blindness.

SO ON THIS, my second day, I should try to probe into the soul of man through his art. The things I knew through touch I should

now see. More splendid still, the whole magnificent world of painting would be opened to me.

I should be able to get only a superficial impression. Artists tell me that for a deep and true appreciation of art one must educate the eye. One must learn through experience to weigh the merits of line, of composition, of form and colour.

If I had eyes, how happily would I embark on so fascinating a study!

The evening of my second day I should spend at a theatre or at the movies. How I should like to see the fascinating figure of Hamlet, or the

“Has it ever occurred to you to use your sight to see into the inner nature of a friend?”

gusty Falstaff amid colourful Elizabethan trappings! I cannot enjoy the beauty of rhythmic movement except in a sphere restricted to the touch of my hands. I can vision only dimly the grace of a Pavlova, although I know something of the delight of rhythm. For often I can sense the beat of music as it vibrates through the floor.

I can well imagine that cadenced motion must be one of the most pleasing sights in the world. I have been able to gather something of this by tracing with my fingers the lines in sculptured marble; if this static grace can be so lovely, how much more acute must be the thrill of seeing grace in motion.

The following morning, I should again greet the dawn, anxious to discover new delights, new revelations of beauty. Today, this third day, I shall spend in the workaday world, amid the haunts of men going about the business of life.

The city becomes my destination. First, I stand at a busy corner, merely looking at people, trying by sight of them to understand something of their daily lives. I see smiles, and I am happy. I see serious determination, and I am proud. I see suffering, and I am compassionate. I stroll down Fifth Avenue in New York City. I throw my

eyes out of focus, so that I see no particular object but only a seething kaleidoscope of colour. I am certain that the colours of women's dresses moving in a throng must be a gorgeous spectacle of which I should never tire. But perhaps if I had sight I should be like most other women – too interested in styles to give much attention

to the splendour of colour in the mass.

From Fifth Avenue I make a tour of the city – to the slums, to factories, to parks where children play. I take a stay-at-home trip abroad by visiting the foreign quarters. Always my eyes are open wide to all the sights of both happiness and misery so

that I may probe deep and add to my understanding of how people work and live.

MY THIRD DAY OF SIGHT is drawing to an end. Perhaps there are many serious pursuits to which I should devote the few remaining hours, but I am afraid that on the evening of that last day I should again run away to the theatre, to a hilariously funny play, so that I might appreciate the overtones of comedy in the human spirit.

At midnight permanent night would close in on me again. Naturally in those three short days I should not

“My eyes are open wide to all the sights of both happiness and misery so that I may probe deep”

have seen all I wanted to see. Only when darkness had again descended upon me should I realise how much I had left unseen.

Perhaps this short outline does not agree with the programme you might set for yourself if you knew that you were about to be stricken blind. I am, however, sure that if you faced that fate you would use your eyes as never before.

Everything you saw would become dear to you. Your eyes would touch and embrace every object that came within your range of vision. Then, at last, you would really see, and a new world of beauty would open itself before you.

I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. And the same method can be applied to the other senses.

Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an

orchestra, as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again.

Make the most of every sense; glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you through the several means of contact which nature provides. But of all the senses, I am sure that sight must be the most delightful. **R**

Helen Keller contracted a virulent childhood disease which resulted in complete loss of sight and hearing at 19 months. Through a touch alphabet 'spelled' into her hand at age seven, Keller learned language, and then speech, and the world opened to her. She graduated from Radcliffe College in 1904. Keller wrote prolifically, travelled widely, lectured on various topics, and was awarded numerous honorary degrees from universities around the world.



DEFT DEFINITIONS

RD APRIL 1956

Actor: "A guy who, if you ain't talking about him, he ain't listening."

FILM STAR MARLON BRANDO, *LONDON OBSERVER*

Hot dog: "The only animal that feeds the hand that bites it." *FARM JOURNAL*

Tongue twister: "A phrase that gets your tang all tongueled up." *RADIO COMEDIAN FRED ALLEN*





AUGUST 1998

Walter Mikac's Message of Hope

The story of an Australian father's
life transformed by tragedy and despair,
and by love and courage

BY WALTER MIKAC



I remember the days when I was Walter Mikac, the pharmacist, involved in amateur theatre productions, who sat on the school council and golfed on Wednesdays, whose wife and children were part of a small community in an idyllic setting in Tasmania.

I'm alone these days. I sold our house and my pharmacy. I have bought another house in Melbourne and I am trying to start another life. But the one thing I don't have is the thing I want most. My family: Nanette, the wonderful woman who shared 13 years of my life, and my two extraordinary children, Alannah, 6, and Madeline, 3.

I'll never forget the day I first saw Nanette. I was working at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne. Her curly brown ringlets, blue eyes and smile were captivating. At the time I was a trainee pharmacist, she was a nurse. Soon we were going out. I told my parents only a year before that I would never marry. But this girl was everything I wanted and more. Two years later we did marry.

Our early years together were full of love and fun. Our daughter, Alannah Louise Mikac, entered the world on August 28, 1989. She was such a joy. As first-timers, we blundered our way through parenthood.

Madeline Grace was born on August 15, 1992. Christmas 1992 was our first as a family of four and I couldn't imagine being happier.

In February 1994, we visited Netty's parents, Keith and Grace Moulton, in White Beach, Tasmania. It was while we were sitting on their verandah overlooking the beach that Grace uttered the words that changed our lives for ever: "Walter, you should think about starting a pharmacy down here. We really need one."

I momentarily pictured myself standing behind the counter of my own pharmacy. It was alluring, and Grace's words set me into action.

After submitting an application for an approval, we began imagining what our life in Tasmania might be like. The 60-hour weeks I worked would be scaled back, leaving time I could spend taking my girls to the beach, gardening or simply being around to watch them grow up.

The day in April the government letter that was to determine our fate arrived, I had come home tired. As soon as I flopped down on a bed the girls catapulted onto my stomach. "Daddy! I wuv you," Alannah said. "You're the best daddy in the world." This demonstration of love and energy swept away tiredness. Then we opened the letter to discover our application to open our own pharmacy had been approved. More pandemonium broke out.

Three months later, we left Melbourne. We would open our pharmacy in Nubeena, a little village on the Tasman Peninsula about an hour-and-a-half's drive southeast of Hobart.

I saw the building that was to

become my pharmacy on the day we arrived. The property was in a decrepit state. Long days up and down ladders finally resulted in an amazing transformation and we opened for trade on September 1.

Our new life meant I could play golf on Wednesday afternoons. We had fish and chips on the beach some evenings. This was the lifestyle we had been looking for. There was no traffic. Life was simple. We never locked our car in Nubeena. It was a safe place, we thought. Our dogs, Molly and Becky, loved our new life, especially the walks along the beach.

When Molly was killed by a passing car that November I cried for hours. Netty and the girls were devastated, too. "If we feel this bad about our dog dying," Netty said, "imagine how we'd feel if we lost one of our children." It was something I couldn't have imagined.

One of Nanette's favourite spots in the area was the Port Arthur Historic Site, the 19th-century penal settlement of gardens, oak-lined avenues and honey-coloured ruins. Netty's love of history meant the place held a real fascination for her. She never tired of visiting it.

Breakfast on Sunday April 28, 1996, was croissants from the local bakery,

our favourite Sunday fare. It was about 8.30am when I carried them into the kitchen with the weekend paper. The bay below shimmered as the sun rose from behind the hills. Lanie and Maddie were lying on the floor watching *The Lion King* video. Nanette planned to take them to Port Arthur for a picnic and a boat trip.

The Tasman Golf Course is in a beautiful setting, with views to Maingon Bay. My friend Eddie Halton and I had just finished putting on the 13th hole when we heard a succession of loud popping noises. The sounds echoed across the silence of the bay and still echo in my ears.

We heard loud popping noises. The sounds echoed across the silence of the bay and still echo in my ears

After Eddie and I finished the last five holes we headed for the clubhouse where we learned that there had been a shooting at Port Arthur. *It can't be true*, I thought to myself. I decided to ring Nanette. She'd surely be home by now. When I got no answer, a growing discomfort started in the pit of my stomach as we drove home.

At the house, everything was in order. The dishes were done, beds made. Finding no one there, I decided to drive to Port Arthur.

There were lots of people at the historic site, but it was deathly quiet. Ambulances stood outside the Broad

Arrow Café. I remember asking someone, "Have you seen Netty and the girls?" It was a question I repeated all afternoon.

I was no longer taking anything in. I talked to people I knew, but can't recall what I said, or what they said in reply. Every face I saw seemed vacant, uncomprehending. I was becoming increasingly desperate. Where were they? At one point I returned to the café. I must have known it was littered with dead bodies, but I intended to search every centimetre of the place. As I approached the entrance, my friend Dr Pam Ireland grabbed me by the arm.

"You can't go in there," she said, holding me back. "Netty and the girls aren't inside."

"Are you sure?"

"They're definitely not in there," she assured me.

Thank goodness I didn't go into the café. Some people who had lost loved ones had ventured inside. What they saw, I learned later, defied description.

Gaye and John Fidler wrote an account of what happened that day. Twice the gunman walked right up to John and shot at him. Miraculously, he wasn't killed.

"The whole time I was watching the gunman," John wrote, "he had a blank

look on his face. He said nothing. He was looking straight at me, and walking, not running, as if he knew we couldn't do anything to him. He just kept shooting and walking."

It took just one-and-a-half minutes for the man to discharge 29 rounds of his rifle, killing 20 diners and café staff, and severely injuring 12 others.

He then changed magazines and left the café to continue shooting.

At some point during my search, I stopped at a motor inn where I caught a news report on television: "There has been a mass shooting at Tasmania's Port Arthur Historic Site today with the number of victims as yet unknown."

Was it possible my Netty and the girls were among the victims? I wondered. *Could the worst have happened?* I pushed the horrible thought away and decided to look for the car Netty was driving. I found it parked near the wharf. By now I was shaking uncontrollably. I had been searching for nearly two hours.

I can't remember how much time passed, but I recall Pam Ireland suddenly walking towards me. It must have been close to 7pm. She looked me straight in the eyes, holding me with both hands.

"Walter," she said, "Nanette and the

"The power of love and creation will always triumph over the power of destruction and revenge"

girls are dead. I have just identified the bodies. I'm terribly sorry."

"No!" I cried. "You've made a mistake ... not my babies. Not my Netty!"

Shortly thereafter, someone with a two-way radio announced that the killer had barricaded himself in a guesthouse and that shots were still being fired. Police escorted everyone away from the site, and we drove home to wait. Just before 9am the next morning, a TV update told us that the gunman who had been holding police at bay for nearly 18 hours had been apprehended after an all-night siege.

My family's funeral service was set for May 9, the week before Mother's Day. On a pedestal next to the coffins was a framed photo of each of my girls. Nanette, her lips cherry-red against her black velour dress with a wistful expression in her eyes; Alanah, grinning, photographed on holiday at Sea World in Queensland with two front teeth missing; and Maddie, in a yellow polka-dot dress in our back garden, a doll under her arm.

A number of our friends asked to speak at the service. When my turn came, I remember looking at the assembled crowd, feeling Netty's presence giving me strength.

"Don't take your partner for granted," I said. "Don't take your children for granted. Don't take tomorrow for granted. Remember that the power of love and creation will always triumph over the power of destruction and revenge."

Within days of the funeral, almost without my realising it, I found myself involved in the debate about gun control that erupted in Australia following the massacre. I agreed to a TV interview, feeling I owed it to Netty, Lanie and Maddie to speak out in favour of legislation that might prevent such a terrible tragedy from happening again. I didn't want to be aligned with any group. I had never owned a gun or needed to own one. I was speaking from the heart.

Letters came from far and wide congratulating me on the stand I had taken. But there were those who objected. One letter accused me of being a pawn in the hands of the antigun lobby. It was an unexpected sentiment.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing weeks and months, gun owners all over Australia began turning in their weapons. Some, said one newspaper, were crying. It was, in my opinion, a step in the right direction.

The first time I laid eyes on the killer was in Hobart's Supreme Court building. It was shortly after 10am on Tuesday, November 19, 1996, nearly seven months after the shooting.

From a side door a short man with a shaved blond head and light blue suit walked into the room flanked by wardens. I was sitting about two metres away from the bulletproof dock where he sat. Only five people sat between us. My first impression as I glanced at him was his lack of presence. How

ineffectual he looked. I found it hard to reconcile the actions of this person with the wimp that stood before me. I prided myself, as I watched him, in not feeling any anger or aggression.

Actually, I almost felt sorry for him. I had feared that maybe, enraged, I would launch myself at him, and that by doing so he would have won some victory, taking even more from me than he had already taken.

When he was finally sentenced on November 22, 1996, to life in prison for the murder of 35 people and the attempted murder of 20 others, I felt, and still do, that he should not be allowed to live. But if he must live, then I hope he is in jail until he is 100.

For the longest time after I lost my loved ones, I was utterly devastated, barely able to function. The relentless cycle of events in my life after Netty, Lanie and Maddie continues. Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day. And the three most important people in my life are not here to share them with me.

Once I visited the cemetery alone. As I sat there under an overcast sky, a gentle rain began to fall. I was seized by the feeling that Netty and the girls were falling down on me. It's a thought I often have when it rains. That the moisture from the rain soaks through the soil and, somehow, captures some of them from under the ground, then evaporates up to the sky to fall back down again. It's comforting in some ways. I feel as if they're visiting me.

Since the massacre, I have discovered that deep inside me there's a core of strength. I don't know where it comes from, but it tells me: hang in there, you can carry on. I have come to realise that I still have a lot to offer this world – notions of how to make it a better place.

Towards that goal, on April 30, 1997, we launched a foundation, named in honour of my children, to provide financial and other support to child victims of violent crime or the sudden loss of family. Prime Minister John Howard agreed to be the foundation's patron.

As I said at the launch of the Alanah & Madeline Foundation, "Children have a basic right to live in peace and be safe. This is a right everyone should aim for. It is to a future of harmony and peace that we should aspire. We must move forward to keep Australia a wonderful place to live." **R**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Walter Mikac decided in his account not to mention the name of the gunman who perpetrated the dreadful acts of April 28, 1996, declaring that the killer should have no place in history alongside his victims.

UPDATE: The Alanah & Madeline Foundation is a charity keeping children safe from violence and bullying. Since it was established in 1997, it has reached more than two million children and their families across Australia. It supports 10,000 children in refuges or foster homes every year.

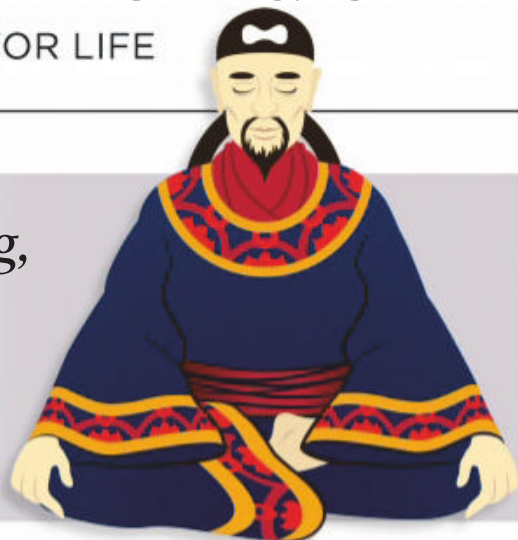
For more information, or to make a donation, visit www.amf.org.au

Points to Ponder

LESSONS FOR LIFE

*To be wronged is nothing,
unless you continue
to remember it.*

CONFUCIUS, CHINESE PHILOSOPHER,
RD SEPTEMBER 1946



The fundamental reason that women do not achieve so greatly as men do is that women have no wives. Until such a time as science or economics correct this blunder of nature, we shall remain, I fear, the inferior sex.

PROF MARJORIE NICHOLSON,
UNIVERSITY DEAN, RD SEPTEMBER 1946

Before you flare up at anyone's faults, take time to count to ten – of your own.

SPRINGFIELD UNION & REPUBLICAN,
RD SEPTEMBER 1946

Manual labour to my father was not only good and decent for its own sake, but, as he was given to saying, it straightened out one's thoughts, a contention which I have since proved on many occasions. To scrub a floor has alleviated many a broken heart and to wash and iron one's clothes

brought order and clarity to many a perplexed and anxious mind.

MARY ELLEN CHASE, RD JUNE 1957

One of the most ridiculous statements ever made is that one picture is worth a thousand words. As an example, I give you not a thousand words but eleven words, and I ask you to put across their message in a picture: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

RICHARD POWELL,
RD AUGUST 1958

The world is a looking glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion.

WILLIAM THACKERAY IN *VANITY FAIR*,
RD JULY 1959





JUNE 1988



Unforgettable Snow White

It was not the Prince's kiss that brought
her to life, but the genius of Walt Disney

BY JOHN CULHANE



Can you name the Seven Dwarfs? If you say Doc, Dopey, Sleepy, Sneezy, Bashful, Grumpy and Happy, you have shown what an enduring hold this beloved film has on people. For the dwarfs had no names in the Grimm brothers' 19th century fairytale. The film in which Walt Disney named them celebrated its golden anniversary last Christmas [1987], and Snow White now has her own star on the Hollywood 'Walk of Fame'.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is one of the most popular films in history. An estimated 500 million moviegoers have seen it since its 1937 premiere. Last year it was reissued for the seventh time – and it became the first film to ever be shown simultaneously in more than 60 countries (including the USSR and China).

In 1934, Walt Disney was famous for his *Mickey Mouse*, *Goofy*, *Silly Symphonies* and the *Three Little Pigs* animations, but short cartoons didn't bring in much money. In fact, if it wasn't for the money Walt's brother, Roy, got for licensing Disney character merchandise, the partnership might already have been bankrupt.

So Walt decided to try for big money. As a boy in Kansas City, he had seen a silent version of *Snow White* starring Marguerite Clark. "That story has everything: the

prince and princess for romance, the dwarfs for comedy, and a wicked old witch as its heavy. It's perfect." So he announced he would make it into an animated feature. "You should have heard the howls," Walt later recalled. Industry analysts dubbed his idea 'Disney's Folly'. They were sure that audiences would walk out on an 83-minute cartoon.

But Disney believed in his idea. "One night," says veteran Disney art director Ken Anderson, "Walt called 40 of his artists to the recording stage. He spent several hours telling us about *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, acting out each character. At the end he told us that it was going to be our first feature.

"It was a shock," adds Anderson, "because we knew how hard it was to do a short cartoon. But Walt's performance inspired us."

"Walt had everybody believing in the picture so much," said animator Ollie Johnston, "that when we were discussing Snow White running through the forest, one guy was alarmed at a drawing of her falling. 'That's a pretty high cliff she goes over', he said 'It might kill her'."

To bring the characters to life, Disney wanted each dwarf to have a definite personality. "We paced around the studio muttering, 'Seven of them! My God, seven of them!'" says animator Frank Thomas. The characters all looked similar, so they were differentiated mostly

by gesture, voice and name. "I've known some domineering doctors," said Disney, "so I called the dwarfs' bossy leader Doc."

"We made Doc stand well back on his heels, with his wrists pressed to his hips, to convey pompousness," says Johnston. "We gave Grumpy a slight hunch and a swagger that made him look pugnacious. Sneezy was a serious, responsible citizen – when he wasn't sneezing."

Hollywood's most famous sneezer, comedian Billy Gilbert, who had already delivered his suspenseful 'ah-*CHOO*s!' in other films, did the voice of Sneezy. Pinto Colvig, the voice of Goofy and Pluto, spoke for both Sleepy and Grumpy. Character actors Otis Harlan, Scotty Matraw and Roy Atwell were cast as Happy, Bashful and Doc respectively.

That left Dopey. In the film, Happy tells Snow White, "This is Dopey. He don't talk none." Snow White asks, "You mean he can't talk?"

"He don't know," Happy replies. "He never tried."

"We won't give Dopey a voice," Disney had said, "That will help him be different."

In search of a natural and an innocent soprano voice for the princess,

Disney phoned Hollywood voice coach Guido Caselotti. Caselotti's daughter, Adriana, was eavesdropping on the extension. Suddenly she blurted out: "How about me?"

Adriana's clear, bell-like coloratura won her the part. And for her prince, they selected Broadway performer Harry Stockwell.

Disney rejected several songs by composer Frank Churchill and lyricist Larry Morey before settling on eight titles that still renew our memories, including 'I'm Wishing', 'Whistle While You Work', 'Heigh-Ho' and, best-loved of all, 'Some Day My Prince Will Come'.

Disney studied the men's snores and decided each of his dwarfs would snore in a distinctive way

SPINETINGLING CACKLE

All through the movie, Disney knew exactly what he wanted. In a 1934 outline, he had said the wicked queen should be "a mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Big Bad Wolf – her beauty is sinister, mature, plenty of curves. Magic fluids transform her into an old witch-like hag." He cast Lucille LaVerne as the voice of both queen and witch. LaVerne's normal voice was beautiful and imperious, but her cackle was spine-tingling.

Everything in Disney's experience seemed to make its way into the film. Animator Ward Kimball recalls that

when Disney went away with a group for a rustic weekend of horse riding, he didn't get any sleep because the other men in his dormitory snored. Disney studied their snores – and found that every man snored differently. On Monday morning he told his story men he was adding something to the sleeping sequence in which the dwarfs give Snow White their bedroom and find places for themselves downstairs. Each dwarf, Walt said, was going to snore in a distinct way, and together they would add up to “a symphony of snores”.

One after another, great snoring ideas were sketched, pinned up on storyboards and animated.

Grumpy, like Walt, can't sleep. He lies in the soup pot and listens to the others snore. Bashful, in a drawer, snores in low moans. Happy, in a cupboard, blows snores that end in long whistles. Doc rumbles in the sink and gargles as the tap drips into his throat. Sneezy snores like a chain saw. Dopey with a whimper. Sleepy's puckering inhalations and lip-smacking exhalations make a snoring duet with a fly (whose snore is a violin's E-string).

A more important means of

revealing the dwarfs' personalities was in the variety of their walking styles, according to Frank Thomas. In one scene animated by Thomas, Dopey falls out of step, then does a little hitch step to catch up. “Walt said, ‘Hey, that's good – we ought to use that all the way through the

picture,” Thomas told me. “A lot of stuff had been animated, but Walt called all those scenes back for revision. That often happened. A better idea would come along – and you would change everything.”

My cousin, Shamus Culhane, animated the scenes in which the dwarfs march home from their

jewel mine singing ‘Heigh-Ho’. It took Shamus almost six months to make the 2000 drawings. The whole film required about two million. The 90-centimetre-long sheets filled the shelves round the drawing board of Shamus and his assistant, Nick DeTolly.

One day, Shamus looked up in horror: DeTolly's cigarette had fallen into a pile of rejected drawings on the desk. “Flames leapt from one shelf to the next,” says Shamus. “My whole sequence was on fire in seconds.”

Before DeTolly smothered the

More than a successful movie, it is a treasured memory shared by succeeding generations of parents and children.

flames with a towel, some drawings had burnt to within half a centimetre of the figures – but none was so badly damaged that it couldn't be photographed for the film.

ULTIMATE DRAMA

The drawings' loss might have meant the demise of the 'Heigh-Ho' sequence – Disney was running out of money. *Snow White* had already exceeded twice the original \$US500,000 budget, and bank officials balked at lending any more unless they could see what he had done so far.

Once again, Walt had to tell part of the story. Freddy Moore remembered this as Walt's finest hour, during which he kept leaping to his feet to pantomime the missing action, "including the antics of the dwarfs, the Wicked Witch tempting Snow White into biting the poisoned apple, and the ultimate drama of Snow White being awakened in her glass coffin by the Prince's kiss."

"Well, as everyone knows," Disney said years later, "we got the loan, the picture made money, and if it hadn't,

there wouldn't be any Disney Studios today." The final cost was about \$US1.5 million.

In 1939, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* won Disney a special Academy Award – a full-sized Oscar with seven miniature Oscars alongside – for having 'charmed millions and pioneered a great new entertainment field for the motion-picture cartoon'.

Snow White remains on the list of all-time box-office hits, with a worldwide gross of more than \$US500 million. But by now it is more than a successful movie. It is a treasured memory shared by succeeding generations of parents and children.

The week of the film's 1937 première, *Time* magazine published a cover story that has proved to be prophetic. *Snow White* is "a combination of Hollywood, the Grimm Brothers and the sad, searching fantasy of universal childhood," it said. "It is an authentic masterpiece, to be shown and loved by new generations long after the current crop of Hollywood stars are sleeping where no Prince's kiss can awaken them." **R**



PICTURESQUE SPEECH

RD JUNE 1985

Sea Breezes

The incessant breathing of the waves. COLETTE

A sailboat stalled in a no-wind situation. VICKI WOODYARD

Sunset kindling on the sea. BONNIE MAY MALODY





APRIL 1999

Here Comes a Cyber Mum

How a mother retrieves
her brood from an empty nest

BY LIAO YU HUI

FROM THE *UNITED DAILY NEWS*

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY COMPOSITE

Our son has left for university and our spoilt daughter has gone overseas. Even Mother seldom visits now that her grandchildren are no longer around. In less than one short month, our once boisterous home has become so very quiet and desolate.

I miss my children so much that I keep in touch with them on the computer whenever I can, showing I care and to keep up my nagging. At first it was only through email messages. On several occasions I got on to the website of our son's university to learn about his life there, and was pleasantly surprised to see his greetings on the bulletin board service: "Hi, Mum! So you're on the net as well!" Since then I have been visiting the websites regularly hoping to catch up with my children.

My acquaintance with the computer started when I was working on my thesis. I was initiated into it, quite unintentionally, when I was looking for a convenient way to store my research material. And I miraculously became a 'netizen' the moment one of my students set up a personal website for me. I have since been busy communicating with my readers and students through the net. I can hardly believe it myself that a technophobe like me could somehow get entangled with the most modern technology! And

that since my children left home the net has become the best way for our family to communicate and share our feelings.

We started off sending messages by email only – just to say hello, to seek help and to admonish. Messages such as: "Please have a look at this email. I can't open it." Or, one that I sent to my daughter says: "So you rang to say you'd lost your credit card. The very thing that I've been worrying about! If you don't try hard to mend your careless ways, you'll wake up one morning and find that you've lost your brain as well."

And my son's messages are typical in their sensational headings, such as "Help me please!" "Help again, please!" They are no different from the notes he used to leave on the white board at home when he was young. They are always about money. "I've bought some books for the new term and money is running short. Please help. I also bought a new pair of glasses. They have a blue frame and cost me US\$90. Help me please! Help me please!"

My daughter, on the other hand, would harangue her elder brother like a grand old lady: "Don't upset Mum when I'm not home. Go back to see Mum and Dad every now and then. They've only got you and me."

Winter came. My son took his quilt and woollen blanket to his quarters at the university. He even made off with the spirit lamp, coffee pot and

toaster, as if leaving home for good. I felt rather broody and sent him an email message. "This morning when I saw you take the toaster and coffee pot, as if you were starting a family of your own, saddened us. Our expectations are that you will come home every Saturday and sit down with us to have a cup of coffee. That makes our missing you bearable."

I got a humorous response from him the following day: "Here's a joke for you, Mum. That school friend of mine brought a coffee pot from home. He wanted to make a good cup of coffee to remind himself of his home sweet home. When he emptied everything out, he found that he'd forgotten to bring the coffee!"

Recently, our son has been emailing me all kinds of articles: funny, touching, intellectual ... the lot. Recommended reading, he said, which would help me understand my students' ideas and keep abreast of the times, so I wouldn't be written off as over-the-hill too soon.

I read the articles religiously, like an obedient pupil. I appreciate my son's goodwill with mixed feelings. The kid I was bombarding with newspaper clippings not that long

ago has now become my mentor! So I responded with the following email:

"Thank you, my son, for all those interesting net articles, despite the confusing sense of role reversal that I have. Nonetheless, I'll take it as a loving son's expectations towards his mother. He must be thinking that his mother is still pliable enough for reform. That makes me feel proud. The thing that old folks lack most is flexibility, in both muscles and ideas. I think you do feel that my thinking is still flexible, right?"

So we chat and exchange ideas through the net, and encourage each other with

a gentle and beautiful language we seldom use. Every time I sit in front of the computer and read those instant messages I feel warmth welling up in my heart and a profound gratitude to modern technology.

The world has really become a global village. Through the internet, my children and I stay close to each other. **R**

"Thank you, my son, for all those interesting net articles, despite the confusing sense of role reversal I have"

Liao Yu Hui is a Taiwanese prose writer who has received numerous literary awards. Many of her works have been selected as literature texts in schools.





FEBRUARY 1998



Lost in the Coral Sea

Their boat had sunk 60 kilometres from
land and no one knew where they were.
Could the skipper save his crew?

BY TRACEY AUBIN



From the wheelhouse of the MV *Nessodden*, 24-year-old Steve Pickering stared moodily at the pewter-coloured Coral Sea stretching to the horizon on all sides. For nearly two weeks in September 1994, the tall, dark-haired skipper and his crew – Rachel Walsh, his 25-year-old girlfriend, and Kurt Thomson, 17 – had trawled the tepid waters 180 kilometres southeast of Cairns on Queensland’s far north coast.

Despite working long hours in tropical heat, they had deposited only 2000 kilograms of crayfish in the trawler’s freezer, not enough to break even on the trip. Steve had laboured on fishing boats along the Queensland coast for seven years, earning a reputation as a reliable crewman. This was his first skippering job on the 80-tonne *Nessodden* and he had been anxious to prove his worth and deliver a healthy profit to the boat’s owner. *No chance of that now*, he thought.

Another concern was that he had disappointed Rachel. When they’d met three years earlier at a party in Townsville, Steve had immediately been drawn to the pretty brunette. As she talked enthusiastically about her marine biology course at James Cook University, he felt as if he had found a kindred spirit. *She loves the ocean, just like me*, he thought. Since then their relationship had blossomed, and Rachel had readily agreed to work

for him on the *Nessodden*. Now Steve worried she’d see him as a failure.

Steve squinted at the sun and calculated it was about 5pm, approaching dusk. “Come on,” he called down to Rachel and Kurt on the foredeck. “We’d better get the nets in.”

Kurt, a quiet, bespectacled youngster, had met Steve and Rachel on a trawler base in Cairns before they set sail from Townsville. For them, Kurt’s capacity for hard work and his ever-present grin made him a welcome addition to the crew.

Kurt and Rachel prepared to help with the winching of the three nets. It was hard, demanding work. Two synchronised winches, designed to pull the nets up evenly, would normally keep the boat steady. But with fuel tanks low, the crew was concerned the boat would be less stable than usual.

The winches, connected by cables to the nets, were powered by a motor operated from the wheelhouse. On his control console, Steve pushed a pair of levers forward to start the drums turning. Immediately they let out a high-pitched whine.

A sudden, grinding noise from the winches made Steve look down. He felt a chill of fear. *One of the winches has failed*, Steve thought. Immediately the trawler lurched to starboard as the still-functioning winch bore the full weight of the nets.

Steve lunged at the levers to shut off power but the weight of the nets was now entirely on the starboard side,

causing the boat to list further. As the starboard railing dipped below the water, Rachel and Kurt scrambled to the uppermost side of the deck. "Get off the boat!" Steve yelled helplessly.

Steve stood frozen with fear. His mind raced. There was no time to radio a mayday or reach the life raft lashed to the wheelhouse roof. Then he remembered: The beacon! An emergency, position-indicating radio beacon was hanging inside the wheelhouse. Once activated, the shoe-box-sized device would emit emergency radio signals. Within half an hour, a rescue boat could be on its way from Townsville, 150 kilometres to the southwest.

Almost half the deck was now submerged. Steve tried to reach the beacon, but his feet kept slipping on the crazily tilting surface. The wheelhouse now jutted almost horizontally over the water. Realising there was nothing he could do to stop the boat capsizing, Steve dived overboard a second before the *Nessodden* took a final lurch to starboard. He surfaced in time to see the overturned boat wallowing like a whale.

"Steve!" Rachel sobbed as the three of them trod water. "What are we going to do?"

With shaking hands, he helped Rachel and Kurt climb onto the hull, then scrambled after them

"Keep calm," Steve replied, fighting panic himself. "Climb back onto the hull. The air trapped inside will keep her afloat for a while." With shaking hands, he helped Rachel and Kurt climb onto the hull, then scrambled after them, straddling the weed-covered keel. "We'll surely be rescued before she sinks," he said, trying to sound confident.

But Steve was deeply worried. They were at least 60 kilometres from land – well outside shipping lanes – and night was approaching. All three wore only T-shirts and shorts. They had no food or fresh water, and had eaten nothing since morning. *And nobody knows we're in*

trouble.

Again Steve felt guilty. *What sort of skipper can't even keep his boat afloat?* he wondered. He cursed himself for not retrieving the beacon earlier. Then he had a thought. *Maybe I can dive for it.* The wheelhouse was about four metres below the surface. If he could find the beacon before nightfall, they would soon be rescued.

With Rachel's pleas to be careful in his ears, Steve plunged into the sea and swam downwards. Salt water stung his eyes as he located the dark rectangle of the wheelhouse's

open door. Grasping the door frame, he hauled himself inside. His lungs clamoured for air as he scrabbled at the wall for the beacon. But his fingers closed round an empty bracket. He fumbled his way out the door and upwards. Breaking the surface, he sucked in great gulps of air. "It's got to be there," he gasped.

Steve dived again and again, to no avail. Finally, exhausted and with darkness falling, he was forced to give up. Grabbing a flotation ring and a doona floating near the trawler, he accepted Kurt's hand pulling him onto the hull.

With the sun gone, the three huddled under the sodden doona and tried to extract heat from each other as they took turns dozing. At dawn, Steve tried diving for the beacon again without success. Tired and thirsty, the trio saw that the boat was sinking. When it capsized, its propeller had protruded from the water. Now it was out of sight. "Once she goes we'll have to swim for it," Steve said.

"Won't we have a better chance if we swim now?" Rachel asked. Steve hesitated. These waters were renowned for tiger sharks. Even if the sharks left them alone, they would be threatened by dehydration, Steve

realised. Within a few hours, the sun would burn and blister their unprotected skins, and salt would leach moisture from every cell. Within 24 hours, most people immersed in salt water are dead.

Steve shook off the thought. Swimming was their only hope. "OK, if we go now, we might get rescued before

nightfall," he said. He fished a second flotation ring from the water and tied it to the first. Then the trio pushed away from the boat, all three clinging to the flotation rings.

As they kicked away from the rising sun, Rachel began to cry. "Steve, I'm scared," she sobbed.

"Try to be brave,"

Steve replied. He felt a surge of concern for Rachel. Before this trip, she had surprised him with a present – an ornamental sword he had admired in an antiques shop. It had taken her months to save the money to buy it. *I can't let her down*, he thought. "Rachel," Steve said, "if we make it through this, let's get married." Rachel managed a smile through her tears.

By early afternoon, the trio were exhausted. They had been swimming for over six hours and there was still no sign of land. Their faces were burned bright red. Seawater parched their mouths. Their lips were cracked.

*Even if the
tiger sharks left
them alone,
they would be
threatened
by dehydration
and sunburn*

With nothing but sea on the horizon, Steve had given up reaching land. Instead he aimed to get inside the Great Barrier Reef, about 20 kilometres to the west, where they might be spotted by a tourist boat or the Australian Coast Watch. Steve was no quitter. In swimming competitions at school, his determination and stamina had caught the attention of Australian Olympic swimming coach Laurie Lawrence, who had personally trained him for several years.

Hours passed – an endless purgatory of thirst as they mechanically kicked. For what seemed like the hundredth time, Steve lifted his head from the water and peered at the horizon. Then his heart skipped a beat. Several kilometres ahead, he thought he saw a trail of white, a sign that water was breaking. “There!” he said. “The reef!”

With renewed energy, they kicked on. Within an hour, they noticed something else: a poppyseed speck of land on the horizon. Steve guessed it was either Hinchinbrook or Dunk Island – both tourist islands with busy resorts – but knew it could be 20 kilometres away. *Can we survive another night at sea?* he wondered.

As the sun dipped low, the trio felt themselves pushed to and fro by strong currents. Steve knew currents often converged above coral.

“It’s a good sign. We may be crossing a reef fringing land,” he said.

Finally, the trio saw the first real evidence that they had reached the

reef: below them, colourful coral tips. Steve pointed to a spot about 300 metres to their left where the water was calmer. “That’s a channel,” he said. “We’ll cross there.”

When they reached the channel, Steve struck out first. Once clear of the reef, he refused to stop. “We can’t wait for someone to find us,” he said. “If we keep going, we might reach the island before midnight.” Rachel and Kurt followed with leaden limbs.

Steve encouraged his crew to press on but Kurt was exhausted. He lay still, floating on his back.

Steve took stock. He estimated they had been swimming for more than 18 hours and that it was now about midnight. They had left the reef at least five hours earlier, yet the island seemed no closer. But if they allowed themselves to drift, the tide might drag them back towards the open ocean.

Despite his own exhaustion, Steve knew there was only one solution if he wanted to save his crew. “Here, take these,” he said, thrusting both flotation rings at Rachel. “Grab hold of my ankle.”

Rachel and Kurt looped their arms through the rings. Then Steve began to swim, towing them through the water with grim determination. His already exhausted limbs burned with the build-up of lactic acid – waste product from overtaxed muscles – but he forced himself to think of Lawrence and what he would say during swimming training: “No pain! No gain!”

For more than five hours, Steve hauled his crew through the water, his pace barely slowing. “For God’s sake, you’ve got to rest,” Rachel eventually begged him. But Steve powered on. *We must reach land.*

At dawn, a thick fog settled on the water and Rachel lost sight of the island. “Take a break, Steve,” she pleaded again. “Just until the mist clears.”

“We can’t stop,” Steve told her. “I just passed by a shop.”

With alarm, Rachel realised that exhaustion was taking its toll. “Steve, you’re hallucinating,” she said.

Confused, Steve turned, breaking Rachel’s hold on his leg. In his fuddled mind, Steve now thought he saw a fishing boat ahead. He swam on. Soon he had lost the others. After coming this far, the ocean had defeated them.

Just after 9am on September 19, 24-year-old Brisbane accountant, David Fox, gunned the engine of his runabout at Yamacutta Reef, 40 kilometres east of Dunk Island. On holiday in the area, Fox and two friends were searching for a fishing spot.

As the boat scudded westwards through the fog, Fox saw a slight movement in the water a few kilometres to his left. But as they drew closer, he shouted in astonishment.

Pulling up, Fox saw a young man and woman in the water, clinging to flotation rings. When the men hauled them into the boat, the pair collapsed. Both greedily gulped water from the men’s canteens, then vomited.

As Fox prepared to rush them to shore, Rachel struggled to speak. “What?” Fox asked, cupping his ear to hear over the noise of the engine.

“My boyfriend,” Rachel croaked, pointing towards the open ocean. “He’s out there.” Fox scanned the horizon, but saw no one. *She’s delirious*, he thought. Then he spotted a speck several hundred metres away. As he sped towards the spot, Fox saw a young

As he sped towards the spot, Fox saw a young man floating on his back in the water

man floating on his back in the water. The man’s arms moved feebly.

“He’s alive, get him in!” Fox yelled. Steve started vomiting as soon as he had a drink. Fox radioed the coast guard at Ingham, a small town on the mainland: “I have three people needing medical treatment.”

It was 9.15am. Steve, Rachel and Kurt had been in the water for 26 hours. In hospital, Steve was treated for a torn stomach lining from repeated vomiting and severe stomach ulcers.

“After what Rachel and I have been through,” Steve said later on, “nothing can keep us apart.” **R**

Personal Glimpses

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE LIVES OF THE FAMOUS

Joan Crawford was the definitive Hollywood star of all time, and enjoyed it. She once walked out of New York City's famous '21' Club, looked up at the sunny sky and told her chauffeur she was going to walk.

"But, Madame," he warned, "you'll be mobbed."

"Well," she replied, "I should certainly hope so." **JACK O'BRIEN**, RD OCTOBER 1977



"Murderer! Coward! Liar!" a stranger once wrote to Winston Churchill, enclosing savagely sarcastic verses.

"I am very sorry to receive your letter with the evidence it gives of your distress of mind," replied Mr Churchill. "The fact that you do me the greatest injustice does not deprive you of my sympathy, since you have obviously suffered so much."

HOWARD PHILIP IN *THE PSYCHOLOGIST*,
RD AUGUST 1940

As an air raid warden, comedian Groucho Marx, assigned to instruct a class in first aid, was driven to distraction by the stupid questions asked. Finally one woman said:

"Mr Marx, suppose you went home and found your wife's head in the oven with the gas jets on. What would you do?"

"That's easy," growled Groucho. "I'd baste her every 15 minutes!"

DOROTHY KILGALLEN, RD NOVEMBER 1942

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 82, has been the most commanding and the most outspoken figure on the Washington, D.C., social scene for many years.

A pillow in her sitting room bears the words: "If You Can't Say Something Good About Someone, Sit Right Here By Me."

JEAN VANDEN HEUVEL IN *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST*, RD DECEMBER 1966





OCTOBER 1957

What It Takes to Be Royal

Five years into Queen Elizabeth II's reign, and with the Commonwealth of Nations still in its infancy, Reader's Digest was invited to go behind the scenes at Buckingham Palace with the world's most influential royal

BY FRANCIS DRAKE AND KATHARINE DRAKE

At Admiralty Arch in London, a bobby is holding back traffic, extending the right of way for a sprightly horse-drawn carriage whose maroon door panels display the royal arms. Inside the carriage are some worn red-leather cases – the Queen’s boxes, containing top-secret reports and memoranda flown in daily from all over the world. At Buckingham Palace a Queen’s messenger descends with the boxes – one of them a top priority Foreign Office box – and carries them through nearly half a mile of corridors to a room on the second floor of the palace.

This famous room is the Queen’s ‘office.’ About 99 per cent living room, it is spacious and handsome, with a subtle colour scheme of green and oyster grey, against which the light reflects a rich gleam from period porcelains, crystal, gold leaf, silver and glossy tabletops. Staring down from the walls, some dozen ancestors, combining looks of melancholy virtue with heavy, full-lipped mouths, share a family resemblance.

This is a feminine room – all that challenges it is a man-size mahogany desk, right-angled in a huge bay window overlooking the palace garden. The desk is awash in official-looking papers and, from it a wall of photographs juts up, a cheerful hodgepodge of children, family groups,

uniforms, wedding gowns, boats, dogs, horses.

Sitting at this desk, pen in hand, brows puckered, is one of the most remarkable young women of our time – Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith. But neither hereditary titles nor the documents before her reflect Elizabeth’s personal record of achievement – the fact that in five brief years her effort and personality have made her the best-loved, best-known, most travelled, most energetically dedicated sovereign in the history of the realm.

Elizabeth is wearing a cherry-red wool dress, pearl necklace, pearl earrings and no shoes. It is one of the rare moments of the day when the royal footwear can be off duty, even if their owner cannot. There is about her a tissue-paper immaculacy, a formidable neatness. Not a wisp has escaped the moderately wavy, conventionally coiffed, medium-brown hair; the famous Windsor skin is petal fresh. In private, Elizabeth is as regal as in public – no impatient gestures, no elbows on the desk, no slouching. The royal back is like a board, a legacy from the late Queen Mary, whose own ramrod carriage remained, to the end, inflexible.

THE INVITATION

The Queen selects a gold key – there are only two and the Foreign Secretary has the other – and opens the

Foreign Office box. The first missive she picks out provokes a spontaneous exclamation of pleasure. Written on White House notepaper, it is signed 'Dwight D. Eisenhower' and contains an invitation to visit the United States in October 1957.

The Queen is delighted, but not exactly bowled over by surprise. The invitation has been hanging fire for nearly 18 months. Initiated at low diplomatic levels to avoid boomerang embarrassments, it was finally smiled on by President Eisenhower and the Prime Minister, then shelved because of the Middle East situation, revived for spring possibilities, dropped because of royal commitments to Portugal, France and Denmark, reconsidered, scuttled by indiscreet 'leaks', finally revamped to include the opening of the Canadian Parliament.

The actual appearance of the invitation informs the Queen that (a) it has finally achieved the blessing of the three governments and (b) that her wish has come true – to visit the US during the year commemorating the first British settlement at Jamestown. The project is of such importance that the Palace will henceforward refer to it as 'The Visit'.

On the surface, The Visit looks like

another routine trip by royalty. Actually, it is designed to emphasise the coming of age of a new group of nations which, if they stay united, may some day rival the power of the US itself. Elizabeth goes to visit the US less as Queen of England than as Head of the Commonwealth, an organisation in which Empire domination has been replaced by partnership.

The serious-faced young Queen knows that much water has flowed under London Bridge since 1776, when ancestor George III, up on the wall, lost those pesky colonies. To Britons of the Queen's generation 'colonialism' is a dead issue. She is as proud

as her countrymen that while the Communists have been holding 100 million people behind the Iron Curtain, the British have been freeing 500 million from colonial ties, investing US\$300 million a year in their local industries and helping them to organise complete self-government, no strings attached. In her first sovereign visit to the New World, Elizabeth will be representing the very same ideas of liberty pioneered by her American kinsfolk.

From daily perusal of her boxes, Elizabeth also knows that this policy is good for all concerned. England's

*In private,
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trade with her former territories has nearly doubled, while their own local production has increased 1200 per cent. Her young Commonwealth now numbers about 640 million people – a quarter of the population of the globe.

The Queen has made herself the symbol of this Commonwealth's unity. With her husband she has tramped the length and breadth of the new nations, making devoted friends. The new nations feel that she understands them. They believe that she is on their side – and to an extraordinary extent, she is. The young Queen and her husband will probably influence the world in which we live as few couples have ever done in history.

THE GIRL AND THE QUEEN

Sitting alone at her desk, intently considering all the implications of the President's invitation, something is missing from the Queen's appearance as the world generally sees it. It is the 'smile', target of millions of cameras, the catalyst that can bestow on Elizabeth's fresh good looks a quality of beauty. Without the 'smile', the relationship between girl-at-desk and ancestors-on-wall is quickly apparent. To

the Queen, the most even-tempered, least moody member of the royal family, this stern-mouthed, Hanoverian heritage has been a trial since childhood.

To overcome it, she is forced to smile unrelentingly every moment she is in public. If she relaxes, reporters may write that 'the Queen appeared displeased', which can be disastrous for the organisation she is visiting. The strain of smiling for hours on end can be understood only by those who have tried to do it. The muscles of the face tremble with fatigue, the smile becomes a grimace. Elizabeth has mastered the difficulty, just as she has conquered the exhaust-

ing job of standing hour after hour in spite of aching muscles.

Off duty, her manner is relaxed, friendly, her reactions as natural as those of any girl anywhere. She is gentle with the nervous and the tongue-tied, for she is shy herself. She is mad about her husband and her children, and she fights continuously to keep her family life separated from her official duties. She prefers a small house to a palace, the country to the town, sports clothes to formal dresses. She has a lively sense of humour and,



The Queen is renowned for her love of Welsh corgis

when anything appeals to it, her hands go between her knees, back goes her head and she laughs unrestrainedly.

On duty, her blue eyes take on a cool expression in which can be sensed some of the spiritual loneliness imposed by the Crown. The job of being Queen calls for endless devotion to endless duties. If there is conflict between love and duty, pleasure and duty, even exhaustion and duty, there can be only one decision. It is a lot to ask of a fun-loving girl with her own family to raise. She could not do it without her religion and a sense of dedication inherited from her father.

Normally good-natured, self-disciplined, slow to anger, Elizabeth has a steel core which becomes apparent if anyone, Philip included, tries to tamper with her obligations as she sees them, or reflects however slightly upon the dignity of the Crown. The eyes blaze, the mouth sets obstinately, and the offender is tartly brought to heel. It is well that she has this steel for, privy to secrets she may not confide even to her own husband, Elizabeth is saddled with crushing responsibilities, not for a term or two, but until the day she dies.

Under the British constitution, no

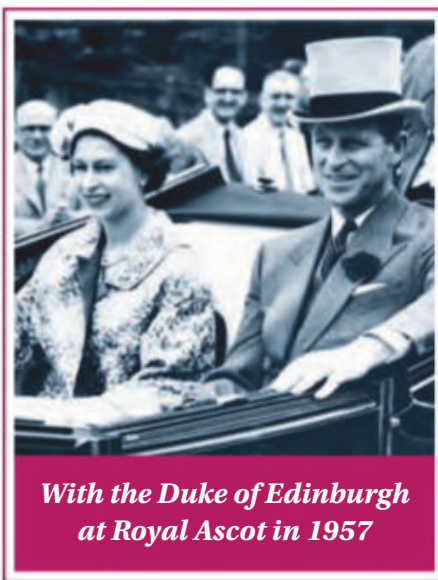
statute is valid until it bears the ancient words 'La Reine le veult' (The Queen wills it), followed by her personal signature – and Elizabeth signs nothing she has not understood. Every important Foreign Office telegram, every top-secret report must be read and filed in her memory for, while politicians come and go, the Sovereign is always there, and it is her duty to help cabinet ministers with her sense of living history.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

The Queen's engagements – to lay corner stones, unveil plaques, place wreaths, plant trees, visit hospitals, attend receptions, review troops, open exhi-

bitions – are made up a year ahead from some 2500 requests for personal appearances. Once she has accepted an engagement nothing is too much trouble.

In the blinding heat of Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), to please the people, she wore her heavy Coronation dress embroidered with scores of yards of gold wire. To complete the costume, she put on a massive diamond coronet, a diamond necklace and long white gloves. Thus clad, she moved for hours through thousands of



*With the Duke of Edinburgh
at Royal Ascot in 1957*

people under a burning tropical sun. Her aides were drenched with perspiration, their white uniforms sticking to their backs, but she finished the day smiling, with even her makeup unsmudged. The Governor General murmured a compliment on her extraordinary performance. "Oh," she replied wryly, picking at the thick embroidery on her dress, "my only fear was that this gold wire would melt!"

The strain of being ever on centre stage is enormous. Occasionally it is almost too great. Prince Philip watches her closely and rallies her on occasion, but sometimes even this backfires.

Once, when they were approaching a large group of children, he whispered to her: "Buck up, old dear, you're drooping." The children dissolved in mirth. They were from a deaf school, lip readers all.

Elizabeth is completely fearless, confident that no one will ever harm her. On her travels in Asia and Africa she has become locked in crowds 10,000 strong. In Nigeria a person jumped into her car – but only to present a petition. In a Johannesburg railway station an old man rushed at her to ask her to go outside where his crippled son could see her. She did. In Canada a youth broke through the Mounties and asked her to give him an autograph. She did not. Blind lepers with disease-ravaged limbs crowded about her in a leper colony, and only her compassion was

affected. At home she goes everywhere unescorted. On one occasion this alarmed the (Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) MVD guarding Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who was paying an official visit at Windsor. To relieve a constrained afternoon, she offered to drive him around Windsor Park in her own sports car. The MVD were horrified.

"But no one will shoot while I am driving!" said Elizabeth brightly. It was no use. The crowned ruler could walk from one end of the Commonwealth to the other without danger, but the head of the Soviet Socialist Republics dared not stir without his police.

POMP AND PROTOCOL

Now a new journey is in prospect. Following the Queen's acceptance of the invitation, plans for The Visit slowly take shape. There are hundreds of items; each is approved or amended by the Queen personally, and the final timetable is printed for the guidance of all concerned. For the Atlantic crossing, a standard plane is charted from BOAC – the British state-owned airline. A few changes are made to provide a private compartment for the Queen and Prince Philip; the choice of crew is left to the airline.

Now comes the selection of the Queen's party. The entourage represents the last word in teamwork. Besides being perfectionists at their

own jobs, they are specialists in protocol and formal etiquette. Each has an assigned, rehearsed role. At every event there must be two ladies in waiting to aid the Queen. There must be two private secretaries and one equerry (royal horse handler) for the Queen and a secretary for Prince Philip. The press secretary must be on hand at all times. Behind the scenes will be the Queen's first dresser, Miss 'Bobo' MacDonald, and one assistant to cope with incessant changes of clothes; a valet for Prince Philip to produce his uniform. All the principals must be backed up by secretaries, servants and assistants. Last and perhaps most importantly, on a state visit is the doctor, ready to head off nervous physical exhaustion, insomnia, digestive upsets, colds and headaches.

Esoteric items of information are now ping-ponging across the Atlantic, between the entourage and their hosts in the US, such as: The Queen is strictly a three-course eater (a note which drove French chefs into melancholia during the Paris visit); she prefers simple fare and is allergic to shellfish ... New York City is not the capital of New York state ... 'God Save the Queen' has the same tune

of 'My Country Tis of Thee' ... American liquor is stronger than British ... British electric razors and steam irons will not operate on an American current ... The President's hobby is painting ... The Queen does not smoke, neither does Philip ... Pocahontas was an Indian female... (Most of the information is for the staff.

Elizabeth and Philip are fond of the US and know more about the country than many Americans.)

The most time-consuming item is the Queen's wardrobe. On this trip, as on all others, she will be stared at, filmed and appraised front, back and sides – from the instant she shows her-

self in the morning until the late hour she retires at night. Every minute of every hour she must look her best, for the cameras will catch the slightest slip-up. An ordinary girl can freshen up as she goes along; but the Queen of England on duty may never twitch her dress, straighten her stockings, repair her make-up, or keep everyone waiting while she retires to powder her nose.

Protocol demands that every dress be new; it would be considered discourteous to appear in a dress worn in another country – or even to appear in one city in a dress worn

*On this trip,
as on all others,
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somewhere else. Each garment must be an original design, for the Queen must never wear a model worn by another woman.

The schedules of The Visit to the United States and Canada show a minimum of ten days on duty, and require as many as five changes a day to allow for day and evening, rain or shine, inside and out. This means a total of 50 dresses, and because every one must be perfect the instant it is worn, each will require three to five fittings – a total of 250 fittings superimposed on the Queen's already crowded schedule.

The star numbers are the evening dresses. For these she summons Norman Hartnell, who made her Coronation dress. His job is extraordinarily difficult. He must bring out the distinction in the Queen's trim, if petite, person, her natural grace and majesty and point out, besides, the romantic appeal that is the complement of crowns. The dresses must photograph well and be light-toned to ensure her being visible against the crowds.

On top of all this, Hartnell must consider the competition of hundreds of other dresses. For instance, in the state visit to Paris this spring,

the Queen was up against the smartest women in France, each with unlimited time and money with which to procure the dress of her life. For the ultimate function, the state banquet with the President of France, Hartnell designed a beautiful gown embroidered in pearls, topaz and gold (all costume jewellery; real gems are

worn on her person, never used on her dresses), showing the fleur-de-lis and poppies of France. It was a creation that could have drowned many women; but when Elizabeth appeared on the grand staircase of the Élysée Palace, her hair blazing with diamonds, her neck circled with an emerald-and-diamond necklace,

her bosom crossed with the brilliant scarlet sash of the Legion of Honour, the women of Paris broke into a murmur of applause. But it was not just the dress, or the jewels, or Elizabeth's youth; it was the extraordinary bearing that transformed a pretty girl into a beautiful woman, radiating an authority and grace inherited from generations of British kings and queens.

Daytime outfits pose a special problem. For example, the Queen looks well in a fitted dress; but she is continually getting out of cars



The Queen's first televised Christmas speech in 1957

before a battery of cameras, and it would ride up. A revealing photograph would only provoke an amused smile among Western people, but in the Asian stretches of the Commonwealth the effect would be deadly; the Queen would lose dignity. Since Elizabeth is not supposed to have legs, the hems of her dresses are heavily weighted. Most girls can hold down their skirts in the wind, but not the Queen. She must hold her purse (in her left hand) often, plus a bouquet – the flowers are generally damp and frequently drip down the front of her new dress – and keep the right hand free for hand-shaking and waving. Princess Margaret, watching her sister standing on a platform at a ship launching, holding the bouquet in one hand, the bottle of champagne in the other, fighting off a gale meanwhile, remarked “Lilibet needs three hands today!”

DEVOTION TO DUTY

The Queen has four months to make ready for The Visit, and she needs that much time, since all the preparations have to be worked into a schedule

already jam-packed with dates made long in advance.

Elizabeth Alexandra Mary of Windsor has had little youth – most of it was consumed in the harsh training of a Queen. She makes it her business to move constantly among people who are grappling with the problem of rebuilding from the ruin of war. “What

the world now needs most is a solid bridge between East and West,” she has said. “The British Commonwealth is surely such a bridge.”

Behind the headlines, the pictures, the speeches and fanfare of The Visit will be the untiring work of a young woman who leaves nothing to chance, and who has a pas-

sionate devotion to duty.

Thanks to her work behind the scenes, everything will seem effortless. Her plane will touch the Washington runway just as the President steps from his car. It will taxi up to him, the door will open, the guns will boom, the band will play, and Elizabeth II, smiling, fresh, assured – and in a gust-proof dress – will walk down the ramp and shake Mr Eisenhower’s hand – on time to the minute. **R**




*With Dwight D. Eisenhower
at a White House banquet*

EXCERPT FROM ‘WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A QUEEN’, FIRST APPEARED IN READER’S DIGEST, OCTOBER 1957. TO READ A LONGER VERSION, GO TO WWW.RDASIA.COM





MAY 1963



If I Could Go to School Again

A heartfelt plea for more
nonsense in education

BY DON HEROLD



A familiar and glamorous sight in Grand Central Station on Sunday evenings is the horde of beautiful college girls gaily rushing back from New York weekends. These lissome figures have always inspired so much romantic imagination in me that I was dismayed recently to learn that some of them get lessons in looking the way they do. One famous New England college, I discovered, has a course in 'social postures', which includes practising walking rapidly on high heels while carrying a suitcase.

Well, I thought, *why not lessons in posture?* I've noticed that people who have outward posture usually have inward posture. And I'm forced to admit that of all the courses I've taken in a long life, dancing lessons have been the most civilising. Dancing is a partial conquest of the awkwardness of the bodies with which we are born, and which soon lapse into mere lumbering transportation machines unless we learn some grace and rhythm.

In fact, if I had my life to live again, I think I'd look for schools that teach us how to have more fun, courses in

nonsense and levity. I'd get expert instruction in drumming, skating, skiing, oil painting, bareback riding, playing the tuba, wire walking, turning cartwheels, bowling, photography and how to get out of playing cards.

I would acquire skills in at least one game that can be played past the age of 40. I spent whole years of childhood on football, wrestling, shoving, baseball and basketball, all of which are worthless to me now. I should have learnt ping pong, archery, or how to play the xylophone and zither. I've forgotten my maths and history. I wish I'd learnt to whistle.

So many teachers taught me how to be serious. If only more had taught me how to be frivolous

I wish some teacher had taught me that a grindstone affords a much too narrow horizon, that I could change *Poor Richard* to read: "Dost thou love life?" Then squander lots of time, for squandering is the stuff life is made of. So many teachers taught me how to be serious. If only more

had taught me how to be frivolous!

Philosopher G.K. Chesterton wrote, "Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap."

So if I had my education to take over, I'd find or invent a course in

abandon. It would include a full term's laboratory drill in how to get out of things: sand traps on golf courses and conversational traps at cocktail parties. I'd learn how to make friendships but also how to break them. I'd learn how to travel light and how to quit things I didn't really like.

How to quit jobs, for instance. They gave us a lot of advice on how to get into jobs, but it takes a genius to know when and how to quit. Other lifesaving arts I wish I'd been taught are: whittling, how to live cheaply, how to avoid group singers, how to avoid being a live wire or encountering one, how to say 'Thank you' and 'I love you' more often.

ISN'T IT PERHAPS a chief trouble with the world today that there are so many people in it who are trying to be useful before they know how to enjoy life themselves – or before they know how to be harmless? Being harmless applies to small

things as well as large. For instance, it should be our duty to wash off the ring around the tub after our bath, to eat soup quietly, to drink no more liquor after we start to impose on the other fellow's eardrums, time or heartstrings.

Above all, it's our downright obligation to people to put up a pleasant front. Author and poet Richard Le Gallienne said, "Gaiety is one of the surest marks of the aristocrat, and it is one of the unwritten laws of French politeness that a long face is a breach of manners. To put a laughing face on the worst is not merely the top of courage, but it shows a well-bred consideration of our neighbours."

The artist Francis Bacon wrapped up the objectives of education thus: "Studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament is in discourse; and for ability is in the judgement and disposition of business."

Note that he puts delight first! **R**

* * *

COMMA SENSE

RD JULY 1962

While Richard Brinsley Sheridan was a member of the English Parliament, he was called upon to apologise to a fellow member. He rose and said: "Mr Speaker, I said the honourable member was a liar it is true and I am sorry for it," adding that the honourable member could place the punctuation marks where he pleased.

THE IRISH DIGEST

Life's Like That

SEEING THE FUNNY SIDE

1940s

Shortly before sailing for the Netherlands, I stopped at a chemist in New York to buy some bubble gum. It was still scarce at the time and I bought all their small stock.

"Going to have a party?" asked the assistant.

"No," I said, "I'm taking it to my friends' children in Holland. It's still unknown there."

As I turned to leave I overheard the assistant remark to another, "See that guy? He's taking bubble gum to Holland; he's going to civilise Europe!"

F.K. WILLEKES-MACDONALD,

RD NOVEMBER 1947

Needing some clothes cleaned in a hurry, I searched the small town in which I was visiting until I found a sign which read: "Cleaning and Pressing, 24-Hour-Service." After explaining my needs I said, "I'll be back for my suit tomorrow."

"Won't be ready till Saturday," replied the proprietor.

"But I thought you had 24-hour-service," I protested.

"We do, son," he said reproachfully. "But we only work eight hours a day. Today's Thursday – eight hours today, eight hours Friday and eight on Saturday. That's 24-hour service."

That's the way it was, too.

FRANK D. MCSHERRY JR,

RD FEBRUARY 1949

It was rush hour on the railway, but I had managed to get a seat and was absorbed in conversation with my boyfriend, who stood in front of me.

Suddenly the woman beside me cut in: "Miss, would you mind changing the subject and talk about the weather or some other uninteresting topic?"

I stared at her with amazement, but before I could say anything she continued, "You see, I get up early, stand up all day, rush home to cook dinner and then do the dishes. The only chance I get for a nap is on the way home, and your conversation is so interesting it's keeping me awake."

I changed the subject.

C.C., RD NOVEMBER 1949

1950s

My husband and I had been invited to a very special party, for which I badly needed a new frock. For weeks I dropped hints – describing and rhapsodising about the new dresses my friends were buying. But my husband ignored the hints. Finally, in desperation, I bought a dress, charged it to him and said nothing.

At the party, I felt proud and happy in my new gown. But on the way home my husband blithely remarked, “Honey, you looked just as well in your old dress as the rest of the girls did in their new ones.”

W. ROOT, RD JULY 1956

Probably the most popular doctor in our community is a GP who takes such warm personal interest in his patients that we’re apt to think of him more as a friend than a doctor. Recently I called on a neighbour who had been indisposed. Finding her feeling miserable, I urged her to call the doctor.

“I’m going to,” she promised, “though I half hate to – it upsets him so when his patients get sick.”

L.W.K., RD JULY 1956

1952

It was rush hour and as usual people were trying to force their way onto a jam-packed train. I noticed one guard helping to cram them in. After he had pushed one burly man through the door, I complimented him. “I’m not doing it for the passengers, lady,” he assured me. “I play semi-pro football on Saturdays, and this is the only exercise I get to keep in condition.”

MRS A. GORDON

RD JANUARY 1952

1960s

When I answered the telephone, a male voice said, “Come on over”. I didn’t reply. “Come on over. We’re waiting for you,” he said again impatiently.

Much annoyed, I asked, “To whom do you wish to speak?” There was a long pause, and then he said, “I’m sorry. I’ve got the wrong number. Nobody I know says ‘whom’.”

JO HELEN SLATE,

RD DECEMBER 1964

For many years my wife complained about my leaving the cap off the toothpaste. Finally, I decided it was silly to go on doing something that was so annoying to her. So I started the habit of conscientiously replacing the cap after each brushing. After about a week, my wife eyed me suspiciously one morning and said,

“How come you stopped brushing your teeth?”

ARTHUR HUNEVEN, RD JULY 1967

When we moved into our apartment, we wondered what kind of people the former tenants had been. A note we found tacked to the window frame

told us. It read: "To the new people, please feed the squirrel that comes to the window every morning about nine o'clock. Menu: oatmeal or toast, cookies or chocolate pudding. Water in jar lid. PS. She has babies."

M.T. COURTLAND,
RD JULY 1967

1970s

My brother-in-law, who was raised in the city and hardly ever saw a horse, visited my father and mother on their country property. He was riding one of my father's horses one day, when suddenly it broke and ran. "I was OK," he reported afterwards, "until that horse just suddenly stopped. Then I went right over the bonnet!"

MRS MIKE BIBER,
RD AUGUST 1973

When nurses at our local hospital moved into new quarters, they found the furniture had not yet arrived. A telegram to the suppliers, requesting prompt delivery of chests and drawers, brought immediate action. It read: 'Drawers urgently required. Nurses quarters bare.'

E. BEVERIDGE, RD AUGUST 1973

1980s

When my father had to have regular hospital check-ups, the local funeral director, a family friend, was very helpful in giving him lifts home. On one occasion, the night before

he was due to come home, the ward sister approached my father.

"Your wife is on the phone," she said with a smile.

"She wants to know what time you will be ready for the undertaker to collect you."

E. HODGSON,
RD JUNE 1986

I was a young teenager on my first unchaperoned holiday. My friends had assured me that all I had to do to meet the young crowd was to go to the beach. On

the first morning, I saw two young men eyeing me up and having a whispered conversation.

Eventually, one of them approached me and asked how long I was staying. My spirits soared. I gave him a glowing smile and replied, "For two weeks." The young man looked startled and said, "Oh,

1979

Since childhood I have had a hearing problem, but recently a specialist confirmed that it was getting progressively worse. At 34, I suddenly felt old and vulnerable. My husband, who had himself just got stronger glasses, was sympathetic. "Don't worry," he said. "Just tell me where they are and I'll tell you what they're saying."

MARY GILHOOLY
RD MAY 1979

in that case, would you mind watching our camera while we go for a swim?"

PAT MERRICK, RD JUNE 1986

1990s

Once while riding my bus to work, I noticed a man at a stop enjoying a cup of coffee. As we approached, he finished drinking and set the mug on the ground. This negligence surprised me, since it seemed to be a good ceramic cup. Days later I saw the same man drinking his coffee at the bus stop. Once again, he placed the mug on the grass before boarding.

When the bus pulled away, I looked back in time to see a dog carefully carrying the cup in his mouth as he headed for home.

VALERIE A. HUEBNER,
RD SEPTEMBER 1990

2000s

About a year had passed since my amicable divorce, and I decided it was time to start dating again. Unsure how to begin, I thought I'd

scan the personal column of my local newspaper. I came across three men who seemed like they'd be promising candidates.

A couple of days later, I was checking my answering machine

and discovered a message from my ex-husband. "I was over visiting the kids yesterday," he said. "While I was there I happened to notice you had circled some ads in the paper. Don't bother calling the guy in the second column. I can tell you now it won't work out. That guy is me."

PAT PATEL,

RD NOVEMBER 2002

Bring a new-born onto a plane and you get 'The Look'. Not one

of 'Oh, what a cute baby'. It's more 'Please God, don't let that mum sit next to me'. So, when our baby began to wail just after take-off, you could have cut the tension with a Tickle Me Elmo doll.

Was my wife rattled? Not at all. She lullabied our daughter with, "I'm teething on a jet plane. Don't know when I'll be calm again."

DAVID VANDENBERG, RD MARCH 2005

2002

I was having some chest pains, but my cardiologist assured me nothing was wrong. Then I told him I was planning a cruise to Alaska and asked if he had any suggestions for avoiding the discomfort.

"Have fun," he said with a straight face, "but don't go overboard."

LES WANDEL

RD NOVEMBER 2002





JULY 1994



The Case of the Missing Keys

The police needed one piece of
evidence to catch a heartless killer

BY DAVID MOLLER



She lay in a 12-foot pool of blood – a young woman in a nurse’s uniform, her arms above her head as if in surrender. Julie Green, 24, had just come off night duty at Wigan’s Royal Albert Edward Infirmary when she met her end, some time before 10am on that Thursday, October 31, 1991. An empty pill canister lay by her right hand, a rolled-up scrap of paper by her left. Nearby on the storeroom’s concrete floor was a two-pound lump hammer, heavily bloodstained.

Detective Superintendent Norman Collinson of Greater Manchester Police paused in the storeroom doorway. A white-haired 47-year-old veteran of some 50 murder enquiries, he methodically scanned the room: a wide workbench along one side, piles of building materials on the other. There was no sign of forced entry or struggle.

He and his colleague Detective Superintendent Frank Smout, 51, went cautiously inside. They found the door to the kitchen locked, a key lying at its foot. Then they retraced their steps through the storeroom’s outer door into the alleyway at the back of 179 Gidlow Lane, and hurried round to the front of the two-storey terraced house.

The victim’s handbag, knitting bag, nurse’s cap and coat lay in the hall. Upstairs in the main bedroom, Collinson saw an alarm clock very like his own – a good timekeeper, but woefully inaccurate alarm.

Julie Green, an attractive dark-haired woman with an appealing, rather toothy smile was a popular figure in Wigan’s close-knit community. Cheerful and outgoing, she was always happy to help others. Even before taking up nursing, she had worked at the hospital as a volunteer. She was very close to her widowed mother; even in her late teens, she often chose to holiday with her and her aunt rather than with her own friends.

In June, 1989 she had married Warren Green, her childhood sweetheart from their days at Wigan’s Deanery High School where Warren, quieter and more academic than Julie, had passed 11 O levels and four A levels. Later he had studied law at Lancaster University and Chester College of Law, and qualified as a solicitor in September 1990. The following month he had started work with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in Salford, preparing criminal cases for trial.

Warren and Julie won respect in the community for their work as leaders with the Scout and Guide packs attached to a nearby church. People were struck by their closeness. He bought her an eternity ring for their first wedding anniversary; she always baked him a cake for his birthday.

Though Julie’s decision to give up her local government job and go into nursing meant a drop in their income, he was supportive. A friend says, “Julie always seemed to be laughing when Warren was around.”

Now 26-year-old Warren, slim and dark-haired with a round, almost boyish face, sat in a CID office at Wigan police station, describing how their seemingly golden life had suddenly lurched into a nightmare.

He had taken three days off to work on converting the storeroom into a garage, he explained. On the previous evening he had been out with his friends Stuart Skett and Andrew Foster, visiting local pubs. Next morning, his alarm had woken him at 10.02am. Julie should have been back, since her shift finished at 7.45. But only the cat, Goliath, lay on her side of the bed. Pulling on some clothes, he went downstairs to look for her. No Julie.

Searching the house more thoroughly, he was puzzled to find he couldn't get into the storeroom from the kitchen. He peered through the keyhole and saw the key was, unusually, on the other side. Remembering a trick he had once seen on television, he slid a newspaper under the door and managed with a screwdriver to jab the key out of the lock. He heard it drop, and carefully pulled the newspaper back. But no key lay on it.

The only way into the storeroom was through its rear outer door. He kept the key to that door with others on a keyring that had a dark leather fob bearing an E-type Jaguar medalion. He was sure he had left the keys on the kitchen worktop the night before, but they had gone.

He knew there was a spare key next

door at 177 Gidlow Lane, which he owned but rented out to Joe McGuire, a funeral director. So he went round and got the spare from Mrs McGuire.

Seconds later, Green found his wife. "I ran into the storeroom," he told the police. "I knelt down in front of her head. I wanted to pick her up and hold her. There was blood all over the floor... A big lumpy pool of blood next to her head."

In the mortuary of the Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, Norman Collinson looked down at Julie's face, with a deep laceration over her left eye. "Could that have been caused by her falling to the floor?" he asked. The pathologist, Dr Edmund Tapp, shook his head. "More likely a punch or a kick from her assailant at the start of the attack."

One massive blow to the side of her head had almost severed Julie's left ear. The position of the other 15 blows indicated that the killer had stood astride her as he methodically smashed her skull. This was no heat-of-the-moment attack, mused Collinson. It was a cold-blooded execution.

He was still at the mortuary when Detective Inspector Jack Booth called from Wigan police station. "Green says he woke at 10am," he said. "If you're returning to the scene of the crime, boss, would you check what time the alarm went off?"

Back at 179 Gidlow Lane with his colleague Frank Smout, Collinson turned the alarm clock's hands.

Although the alarm was set for just before ten o'clock, it rang at 9.40 – 20 minutes early. The two officers exchanged glances. It was something, or nothing.

By 8pm, a darker, more complex picture of the couple had emerged. Detectives discovered from letters they found in the bedside table that for

the past three months Julie had been having an affair with 22-year-old Stuart Skett. They knew it was wrong, Skett acknowledged, but couldn't bring themselves to stop.

"Could Warren have killed her in a frenzy of jealousy?" asked Collinson. His colleagues thought it unlikely. In interviews, Green's friends had painted a picture of a very controlled character – a cold fish. "In any case," added Booth, "he'd hardly been the model husband himself."

Warren Green, they discovered, had become infatuated with Julie Warburton, a 20-year-old law student who was doing work experience at Salford CPS. Warren had given her small presents and invited her out to dinner. When he and his wife were on holidays in Corfu, he had written her love letters.

"Could he have wanted his wife out of the way because of Julie Warburton?" Collinson speculated. Booth shrugged.

"What about Skett?" asked Smout. "Could he be involved?" Booth shook his head. "He's already been alibied out." At the engineering plant where Skett worked, his clocking-on card showed he had come in at 8am, and his workmates vouched for his presence there all morning.

Collinson turned his attention back to Green. He said he had woken at 10am, yet the alarm had clearly gone off at 9.40am. Why was he so keen to lose those 20 minutes?

At 10pm, Green was arrested. He seemed unfazed.

As a lawyer, he knew that a spouse was often an early suspect in an inquiry. Again he

gave Booth his story.

"We don't have a scrap of evidence either way," Collinson said. "Our only real hope is to find those keys"

BY NEXT MORNING, a major incident room had been set up in the CID wing. From Green's home, detectives had retrieved some documents revealing that the couple's finances were tight. Green had bought his home at the height of the market, and taken out loans to pay for renovations as well as an £80,000 mortgage. If his marriage had failed, Julie would have been entitled to half the equity in the house and the adjoining property, but both were only half renovated and difficult to sell in a dead market.

However, the couple were remarkably well insured. Their three separate policies meant that if one of them died, the mortgage would be paid off and the surviving partner would get £70,000 in cash. An additional policy on Julie's life would give Warren another £50,000.

Clearly Warren Green stood to gain financially from his wife's death. But motive is not enough to sustain a charge of murder. Collinson and his colleagues settled down to review the bare facts: Julie had been murdered in a storeroom locked, ostensibly, from the inside; the murderer must have left by the rear outer door, which could only be closed by locking it: the key, on its ring with a Jaguar fob motif, was missing.

Alternatively, Warren himself had murdered his wife and hidden the keys to make it look like an outside job. He wouldn't have risked going outside to get rid of them, in case someone recognised him in the street, so they must still be in the house. If he were the culprit, he would have left the storeroom by its inner door, locking it from the kitchen side. He would then have pushed the key back under the door, to fit his claim that he had knocked it on the storeroom floor with a screwdriver.

"At the moment, we don't have a scrap of evidence either way," Collinson concluded. "Our only real hope is to find those keys."

Detectives scoured Green's house,

local gardens, bins, the patrol car that brought him to the station. No keys.

Other lines of inquiry also proved unproductive. Forensic examination of Warren's clothing failed to reveal even one speck of Julie's blood. And when the police told Julie's mother, Mrs Dillys Sillitoe, that Warren had been held for questioning, she was incredulous: "You've got the wrong man. Warren would never do that."

But if Warren Green hadn't killed his wife, who had?

Booth questioned Green again. "Was there anyone who conceivably have wished Julie harm?" he asked. Green shook his head helplessly. Everyone loved his tender-hearted wife.

Suddenly Green recalled that soon after the discovery of Julie's body, a policeman had told him that there was a pill canister marked Temazepam (commonly used as a tranquilliser) near her right hand. At the time, said Green, he had merely assumed that Julie had put an empty container into her pocket at the hospital. But now he wondered whether Julie had been selling drugs she brought back from the hospital, and locked the storeroom door to avoid being disturbed. Had some transaction gone horribly wrong?

Never forget the dangers of making assumptions too early in a case, Collinson told himself sternly. The murder investigation would now have to become a drugs inquiry. Fresh teams of detectives set to work.

After more than ten hours of interviewing, Green remained calm, courteous and precise. Booth could detect no deviation in his story. On Sunday evening he was released, on the condition he did not return home.

Next morning, the police began another search of Green's house. They scoured the rafters and chimney, scanned nearby roofs and guttering, searched the sewers, and inspected every street drain within a half-mile radius. Still no keys.

Meanwhile, examination of the scrap of paper found near Julie's left hand revealed fresh evidence to suggest she might have been killed by an outsider in a drugs deal: it was the bloodstained bottom left-hand corner of a £10 note. Could Julie have had a row over a drugs deal, then been bludgeoned to death?

Interviews with Julie's relatives and friends offered another clue. Several people mentioned that she had been troubled by mystery telephone calls. When Julie picked up the phone no one answered. The caller waited, then hung up. The calls came only when Warren wasn't home; it was as if someone were watching the house and knew when Julie was alone. Could some sick person be stalking her?

Then Collinson's team received a call from a Mrs Sheila Sillitoe from Wrightington, just outside Wigan. The night before the murder, she told them, a man had rung her, asking, "Is Julie there?" Told not, he said,

"I'm trying to get in touch with a Julie Sillitoe (Julie's maiden name)."

Told that she did not live there, the caller rang off. *Could he, Collinson wondered, be the same person who had been ringing Julie at home? Perhaps even the murderer?*

At a press conference on Wednesday, November 6, Warren Green appealed for help in his soft Lancashire accent. "If anyone, anywhere, can give any information about even the most trivial thing, please contact the police. Please do." Choking back tears, he talked about Julie: "She was full of life and extremely lovely. I loved her. I still love her." Then, against the clicking of dozens of press cameras, he held up a duplicate set of keys Collinson had had made, complete with Jaguar emblazoned fob.

As the second week of Julie's murder wore on, the trail went cold. All enquiries indicated that she had no involvement in the drug scene. Forensic examination revealed no fingerprints on the hammer, and nothing in the Greens' home gave any clue to the killer's identity. The rest of the £10 note could not be found.

Suspicion once more focused on Warren Green. As a CPS solicitor, he routinely sifted through evidence to go before a court, looking for flaws in a police case or defendant's story. He was well equipped to lay a false trail. "But how could he have killed his wife without getting blood on a single bit of clothing?" Collinson mused.

"Perhaps he took his clothes off after he had stunned her with the first blow," suggested Booth. "He delivered another 15 blows, then went upstairs to wash himself thoroughly."

Forensic investigators had found small bloodstains on the bathroom basin and on the tiles above, but not enough to pinpoint a particular blood group. Green could simply have cut himself shaving.

"What about the mystery calls?" asked Collinson.

"Green could have made them all," Smout suggested. "The caller never rang when he was there."

And the call to Mrs Sheila Sillitoe? "Green could have made that too," said Booth. "The next Sillitoe in the directory is Julie's mother. Yet he didn't try her. Why? Because she would have certainly recognised Green's voice."

One more cause for suspicion was the emergency call he made from the McGuires' funeral parlour after finding his wife dead. Instead of immediately requesting an ambulance, he had asked for the police, then begun a rambling account of what he had done that morning. And when traffic patrolman Andrew Cunliffe arrived minutes later, Green again went through the account.

Were Green's actions those of a man in shock? wondered Collinson. *Or was he with his lawyer's training, carefully recording all the details necessary for a watertight alibi?*

The second search of Green's house had revealed a pair of shoes with traces of something that may have been blood on the soles. They were sent for analysis. But the keys were still missing. "The place has been picked clean," Smout reported. Collinson stared gloomily out of his office window. Every instinct told him that Warren Green must be the killer. Yet without the keys, they still had no firm evidence.

He turned back to face Smout. "We're going to have to search the house again, Frank," he announced. "We'll bring in a new search team - perhaps we need fresh eyes."

On Monday, November 11, police began the most thorough search yet. Next morning, they lifted the hall carpet and unscrewed six short floorboards. Torch in hand, PC Ian McAuley began inching along on his stomach in the 18-inch space between the ground and the floor joints. After half an hour peering into the dust-filled gloom, his torch suddenly lit up a pipe recessed almost invisibly under the front door sill, and

***Forensic
investigators
had found small
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the bathroom
basin and on the
tiles above***

blocked with half bricks and rubble, which he started to clear. He flashed his torch down the pipe – and something glinted.

Booth stopped Collinson on the station stairs. “You’re not going to believe this, boss,” he said, beaming. “We’ve found the keys. And they’ve got blood on them.”

Early on Thursday morning, Booth and Collinson began interviewing Green once more. Eventually Collinson described how McAuley had found the pipe in the wall. Slowly the colour drained from Green’s face, “like a blood bank emptying,” Collinson recalls. “Guess what we found, Mr Green?” From a bag hidden on his lap, Collinson placed the keys on the table.

White-faced, Green closed his eyes and rocked back in his chair. Eventually he spoke. “It’s not me.”

Finally Collinson suggested that Green had either planned the murder, or killed his wife in a moment of anger following a dispute. By now Green had recovered his composure. “This is ridiculous,” he responded. “I’ll quite plainly say, I’ve not killed Julie and I couldn’t do it.”

As Green was taken down to the cells, Booth shook his head wearily: “A cool customer.”

On February 23, 1993, Warren Green stood in the dock at Liverpool’s Crown Court No. 5. Dapper in a dark suit, he maintained an air of perplexed innocence.

His mind easily a match for the other lawyers in court, he dismissed most of the evidence as circumstantial. But he was in difficulty over the keys – and the shoes, now shown to carry traces of his wife’s blood. Someone must have put them where they were found. But not him. He looked across at the jury, as if appealing to them to exercise their imagination. The police, perhaps? It was his last hope.

AT THE END OF THE 14-DAY TRIAL, the jury’s verdict was unanimous: guilty. Green slumped in his seat, head in his hands. Sentencing him to life imprisonment, Mr Justice Ognall declared: “You killed your wife in a fashion marked by a chilling degree of control and concentration. You then took determined and sophisticated steps in an effort to mislead the police, and these steps included maligning your dead wife as a criminal and a drugs dealer. It should be recorded that whatever her failings... she deserves to be remembered as a vivacious, caring and decent woman...”

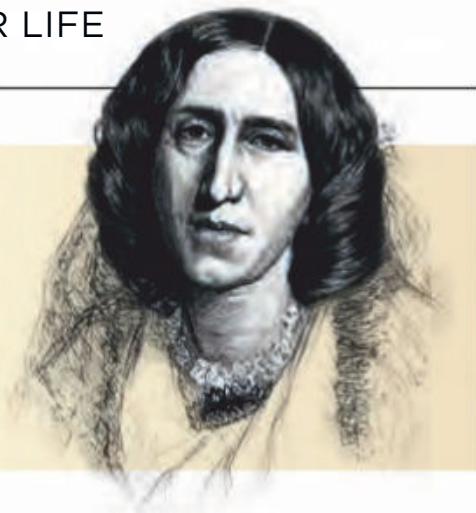
Detective Superintendent Collinson and his colleagues had finally succeeded in bringing to justice one of the most calculated, cold-blooded murderers in British criminal history. “Most people plotting murder think it will be the perfect crime,” says Collinson. “But Warren Green came very close to pulling it off.” **R**

Points to Ponder

LESSONS FOR LIFE

*What do we live for if not
to make the world less
difficult for each other?*

GEORGE ELIOT, ENGLISH WRITER,
RD FEBRUARY 1969



I dread success. To have succeeded is to have finished one's business on earth, like the male spider, who is killed by the female the moment he has succeeded in his courtship. I like a state of continued becoming, with a goal in front and not behind.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW,
PLAYWRIGHT, RD OCTOBER 1966

Marriage should combat without respite that monster which devours everything – habit.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC, FRENCH WRITER,
RD OCTOBER 1967

The most interesting people are those about whom we continue to know the least – not because they surround themselves with mystery, but because some unconscious dignity in them forbids intrusion, and modesty keeps them from the

easy confidence. To them, with their untold secrets, the imagination, fascinated, returns.

ELIZABETH BOWEN, RD NOVEMBER 1967

The tragedy of life is what dies inside a man while he lives.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER, HUMANITARIAN,
RD FEBRUARY 1970

Tidiness is one of those virtues that never will be assimilated with pleasure. It makes life easier and more agreeable, does harm to no one, actually saves time and trouble to the person who practices it – yet there must be some ominous flaw to explain why, in spite of the concerted effort of humanity to try to teach it to the young, millions in every generation continue to reject it.

FREYA STARK, EXPLORER,
RD MARCH 1973





DECEMBER 1964



The Bear That Came to Supper

The remarkable story of a man who met a
black bear in the Canadian woods and the
relationship that developed

BY ROBERT FRANKLIN LESLIE



I met Bosco in the remote wilderness near Mt Robson in western Canada. At the end of a long day of backpacking, I had made a lean-to in a clearing beside a stream and was preparing to catch supper. Then I looked up and there he was, an enormous black bear, slowly circling the clearing within 30 yards.

He wasn't Bosco to me yet, and I viewed his presence with trepidation. My provisions were vulnerable if he was in a piratical mood, since I was unarmed. However, I decided to go about my fishing. The bear came along.

I've lived with wild creatures for 30 years, respecting their first fear – fast movements. I let him see the reason for my actions in every slow, deliberate move I made. Soon he was sitting on his haunches less than five feet away, intensely interested in my activity. When I landed a 14-inch Loch Levin, I tossed it to him. He gulped without bothering to chew. And when I flipped out the fly again he moved closer, planted his well-upholstered bottom on the turf beside my boot, and leaned half his 500 pounds against my right leg!

I plied the grey hackle fly along the stream's riffles and got another strike. Before reeling in, I eased over a yard, convinced the bear would grab fish, line and rod – and maybe me. But he didn't. His patience and dignity were regal as he sat rocking

back and forth, watching carefully. When I released the trout from the hook, he bawled a long, drawn-out “*Maw!*” I held the wriggling fish high by the lower lip, stepped over to my ‘guest’, and shakily dropped the prize into his cavernous, red mouth.

When drizzly darkness set in, I was still fishing for that bear, fascinated as much by his gentle manners as by his insatiable capacity. I began to think of him in a friendly way as Big Bosco, and I didn't mind when he followed me back to camp.

After supper I built up the fire, sat on the sleeping bag under the lean-to, and lit my pipe. All this time Bosco had sat just outside the heat perimeter of the fire, but the moment I was comfortably settled he walked over and sat down beside me.

Overlooking the stench of wet fur, I rather enjoyed his warmth as we sat on the sleeping bag under the shelter. I listened to the rain thumping on the tarp in time with the steady, powerful *cur-rump, cur-rump* of his heartbeat beneath his thick coat. When smoke blew our way, he snorted and sneezed, and I imitated most of his body movements, even the sneezing and snorting, swaying my head in every direction, sniffing the air as he did.

Then Bosco began licking my hands. Guessing what he wanted, I got him a handful of salt. Bosco enthusiastically nailed my hand to the ground with eight four-inch claws

– claws capable of peeling the bark from a full-grown cedar, claws that carry his 500-odd pounds at full gallop to the top of the tallest tree in the forest, claws that could rip a man's body like a bandsaw.

Finally the last grain of salt was gone and again we sat together. I wondered if this could be for real. I recalled Sam Ottley, trail foreman on the King's River in the Sierra Nevada, whom I had seen sharing tent and rations with a bear; but Sam's creature was old and toothless, no longer able to live off the country; this monster was the finest prime specimen I had ever seen.

Bosco stood up on all fours, burped a long, fishy belch, and stepped out into the rainy blackness. But he soon was back – with a message. He sat down near the sleeping bag and attempted to scratch that area of his rump just above his tail; he couldn't reach it. Again and again he nudged me and growled savagely at the itch. Finally I got the message and laid a light hand on his back. He flattened out to occupy the total seven feet of the lean-to as I began to scratch through the dense, oily hair.

Then the full significance of his visit hit me. Just above his stubby

tail several gorged ticks were dangerously embedded in swollen flesh. Little by little I proved to him that my torch light wouldn't burn him, so he allowed me to focus it on his body. When I twisted out the first parasite, I thought I was in for a mauling. His roar shook the forest. But I was determined to finish the job. Each

time I removed a tick, I showed it to him for a sniff before dropping it on the fire, and by the last one he was affably licking my hand.

A cold, sniffing nose awakened me several times during the night as the bear came and went. He left the sleeping bag wetter and muddier each time he crawled

around over me, but he never put his full weight down when he touched any part of my body.

The next day I set off again, over a ridge, down through a chilly river, up the next crest, through thickets of birch and alder and down a wide, north-running river canyon. To my surprise, Bosco followed like a faithful dog, digging grubs or bulbs when I stopped to rest. That evening I fished for Bosco's supper.

As the days passed and I hiked north, I used a system of trout, salt and scratch rewards to teach the bear to respond to the call 'Bosco!'

When I twisted out the first tick, I thought I was in for a mauling. His roar shook the forest

Despite his perpetual devotion to food, he never lagged far behind. One evening he walked over to the log where I was enjoying my pipe and began to dig at my boots. When I stood up he led me straight to a dead, hollow bee tree at which he clawed unsuccessfully. Returning to camp, I covered my head with mosquito netting, tied shirt, pants and glove openings, and got the hatchet. I built a smoke fire near the base of the tree and hacked away until the hollow shell crashed to earth, split wide open, and exposed the hive's total summer production. For my understanding and efforts I received three stinging welts.

Bosco ate 20 pounds of honeycomb, beebread, and hundreds of bees. He snored most of that night at the foot of the sleeping bag.

I'm a sucker where animals are concerned. At campsites Bosco never tolerated long periods of relaxation and reflection, and I babied his every whim. When he wanted his back scratched, I scratched; when he wanted a fish dinner, I fished; when he wanted to romp and roll with me in the meadow, I romped and rolled – and still wear scars to prove that he played games consummately out of my league.

When I woke up, the bear was licking my wound. His shame and remorse were inconsolable

During one particularly rough session, I tackled his right front leg, bowling him over on his back. As I sat there on his belly regaining wind, he retaliated with a left hook that not only opened a two-inch gash down the front of my chin but spun me across the meadow. When I woke up, Bosco was licking my wound. His shame and remorse were inconsolable. He sat down with his ears back and bawled like a whipped pup when I was able to put my arm around his neck and repeat all the soft, ursine vocabulary he had taught me.

After that experience I let Bosco roll me around when he had to play, but never

raised another finger towards originality. If he got too rough, I played dead. Invariably he would turn me over, lick my face and whine.

There were times when he spent his excess energy racing around in 100-yard circles, building up speed to gallop to the top of the tallest fir. When he returned to camp immediately afterwards, I could detect absolutely no increase above his normal breathing rate. He panted only when he walked for long periods in full sun and he got thirsty.

It is not my intention either to attribute character traits to the bear

which he could not possess or to exaggerate those he had. I simply studied him for what he was, and saw him manifest only the normal qualities of his species, which were formidable enough without exaggeration. Other than calling him Bosco, I never attempted human training upon him; conversely, I did everything possible to train myself to become a brother bear.

LIKE ALL SENSITIVE MAMMALS, Bosco had his full complement of moods. When serious, he was dead earnest; when exuberant, a volcano. Being a bear, he was by nature uninhibited; so I never expressed even a shade of the word 'no'. The affection we developed for each other was spontaneous, genuine brotherly bear; when it occurred to him to waddle over my way on his hind legs, grab me up in a smothering bear hug, and express an overflowing emotion with a face licking, I went along with it for two reasons: firstly, I was crazy about that varmint; secondly, I nourished a healthy respect for what one swat from the ambidextrous giant could accomplish.

Although he was undisputed monarch of all his domain, I think Bosco considered me his mental equal in most respects. It wasn't long before he taught me to expand communication through a language of the eyes. How a bear can look you in the eye! Terrifying at first – it grows into the

most satisfactory medium of all. Bosco and I would sit by the campfire, honestly and intimately studying each other's thoughts.

Once in a while he'd reach some sort of conclusion and hang a heavy paw on my shoulder. And I'd do the same. It would have made an odd picture, but many times as I looked into those big yellowish-brown eyes, I felt an awed humility as if the Deity himself were about to effect a revelation through this, another of his children.

Although his size and strength made Bosco almost invulnerable to attack by other animals, he had his own collection of phobias. Thunder and lightning made him cringe and whine. And when a flock of whiskey jacks flew into camp looking for food, he fled in terror – the cacophonous birds power-diving and pecking him out of sight.

Bosco's phenomenal sense of smell amazed me. Trudging along behind me, he would suddenly stop, sniff the air, and make a beeline for a big, succulent mushroom 200 yards away, or to a flat rock across the river under which chipmunks had warehoused their winter seed supply, or to a berry patch two ridges over.

One afternoon when we were crossing a heath where dwarf willows grew in scattered hedge-like clumps, Bosco suddenly reared up and let out a "*Maw!*" I could detect no reason for alarm, but Bosco stood erect and

forbade me to move. He advanced, began to snarl – and pandemonium broke out. Every stand of willow sprouted an upright bear! Black bear, brown bear, cinnamon bear, and one champagne (all subdivisions of the same species).

But these were young bears, two year olds, and no match for Bosco. He charged his closest contestant with the fury of a Sherman tank, and before the two year old could pick himself up he dispatched a second bear and tore into a thicket to dislodge a third. At the end of the circuit my gladiator friend remembered me and scoured back, unscathed and still champion.

That night we sat longer than usual at the campfire. Bosco nudged, pawed, talked at great length, and looked me long in the eye before allowing me to

retire. In my ignorance I assumed it was a rehash of that afternoon's battle. He was gone most of the night.

Towards mid-afternoon I sensed something was wrong. Bosco didn't forage, but clung to my heels. I was looking over a streamside campsite when the big bear about-faced and broke into a headlong, swinging lope up the hill we had just descended. I didn't call to him as he went over the crest full steam without once looking back.

That evening, I cooked supper with one eye on the hillside, then lay awake for hours waiting for the familiar nudge.

By morning I was desolated – I knew I should never again see big brother Bosco.

He left behind a relationship I shall always treasure. **R**

*The bear stood
erect and
forbade me to
move. He began
to snarl and
pandemonium
broke out*



SPICED TONGUE

RD SEPTEMBER 1949

A smile that could eat a banana sideways. **ARTHUR 'BUGS' BAER**

Travelling faster than sound will at least eliminate the voice
from the back seat. **A.A. LATTIMER**

He can convert a minnow of thought into a whale
of sound. **FREDERICK SULLEN**

Points to Ponder

LESSONS FOR LIFE

A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by the men it honours, the men it remembers.

JOHN F. KENNEDY, RD JUNE 1986



Progress means noise. Indeed, we could pinpoint the date when modern civilization was born if we could discover when man first said, "Turn that thing down!"

BILL VAUGHAN,

RD JULY 1978

Parents who expect or want their children to "appreciate" what they have done for them usually find that the children feel resentful or rebellious when they grow older. A noted psychoanalyst points out that the love of the parents goes to the children - and the love of the children goes to their children. A parent should try to rear a child not so much to be a dutiful child as to be a good parent.

SYDNEY HARRIS,

US JOURNALIST, RD JULY 1986

Never seem more learned than the people you are with. Wear your learning like a pocket-watch and keep it hidden. Do not pull it out to count the hours, but give the time when you are asked.

LORD CHESTERFIELD, WHO, IN THE 18TH CENTURY, WROTE ALMOST DAILY TO HIS SON ON HOW TO BE A GENTLEMAN, RD SEPTEMBER 1981

Books say, "She did this because." Life says, "She did this." Books are where things are explained to you, whereas in life things aren't.

I'm not surprised that some people prefer books. Books make sense. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own.

JULIAN BARNES,

RD MARCH 1997





FEBRUARY 1949



Two Gentlemen of Verona

A silent epic of youthful devotion

BY A. J. CRONIN



ILLUSTRATION: GETTY COMPOSITE

As we drove through the foothills of the Alps, two small boys stopped us on the outskirts of Verona. They were selling wild strawberries, scarlet berries that looked delicious against the green leaves lining the wicker baskets.

"Don't buy," warned Luigi, our cautious driver. "You will get fruit much better in Verona. Besides, these boys..." He shrugged his shoulders to convey his disapproval of their shabby appearance.

One boy wore a worn jersey and cut-off khaki pants, the other a shortened army tunic gathered in loose folds about his skinny frame. Yet, gazing at the two little figures, with their brown skin, tangled hair and dark earnest eyes, we felt ourselves strangely attracted. My companion spoke to the boys and discovered that they were brothers. Nicola, the elder, was 13; Jacopo, who barely came up to the door handle of the car, was nearly 12. We bought their biggest basket, then set off towards town.

Verona is a lovely city, rich in history, with quiet medieval streets and splendid buildings of an exquisite pale honey colour. Romeo and Juliet are reputed to have lived there. Bombed in the recent war, it has lost its bridges, but not its gaiety or charm.

Next morning, coming out of our hotel, we drew up short. There, bent over shoeshine boxes beside the

fountain in the public square, doing a brisk business, were our two young friends of the previous afternoon.

We watched for a while, then, as trade slackened, we went over. They greeted us with friendly faces.

"I thought you picked fruit," I said.

"We do many things, sir," Nicola answered seriously. He glanced at us hopefully. "Often we show visitors through the town... to Juliet's tomb and other places of interest."

"All right," I smiled. "You take us along." As we made the rounds, my interest was again provoked by their remarkable demeanour. They were childish enough, and in many ways quite artless. Jacopo, although his lips were paler than they should have been, was lively as a squirrel. Nicola's smile was steady and engaging. Yet in both these boyish faces there was a seriousness which one respected, an air of purpose far beyond their years.

In the week which followed we saw them frequently, for they proved extremely useful to us. If we wanted a pack of American cigarettes, or seats for the opera, or the name of a restaurant that could provide good ravioli, Nicola and Jacopo could be relied upon to satisfy our needs, with their usual cheerful competence.

What struck us most was their unremitting willingness to work. During these summer days, under the hot sun, and in the long evenings when the air blew chill from the mountains, they shined shoes, sold

fruit, hawked newspapers, conducted tourists round the town, ran errands – they exploited every avenue which the troubled economy of the town left open to them.

One night, we came upon them in the windy and deserted square, resting on the stone pavement beneath the pale arc lights. Nicola sat upright, his face drawn by fatigue. A bundle of unsold newspapers lay at his feet, while Jacopo, his head pillowed upon his brother's shoulder, was asleep. It was nearly midnight.

"Why are you out so late, Nicola?"

He had started sharply as I spoke but now he gave me his quiet, independent glance.

"Waiting for the last bus from Padua. We shall sell all our papers when it comes in."

"Must you keep at it so hard? You both look rather tired."

"We are not complaining, sir."

His tone, while perfectly polite, discouraged further inquiry. But next morning, when I went over to the fountain to have my shoes shined, I said, "Nicola, the way you and Jacopo work, you must earn quite a bit. You spend nothing on clothes. You eat little enough – when I see you having a meal it's usually black bread and

figs. Tell me, what do you do with your money?"

He coloured deeply under his sunburn, then grew pale. His gaze fell to the ground. "You must be saving up to emigrate to America," I suggested.

He looked at me sideways, spoke with an effort. "We should greatly like to go to the US. But here, at present, we have other plans."

"What plans?"

He smiled uncomfortably, with that remote air which never failed to baffle me.

"Just plans, sir."

"Well," I said, "we're leaving on Monday. Is there anything I can do for you before we go?"

Nicola shook his head, but suddenly Jacopo's nostrils quivered

like a puppy's and he piped up eagerly.

"Sir," he burst out, "on Sundays we visit the country, to Poleta, 30 kilometres from here. Usually we hire bicycles. But tomorrow, since you are so kind, you might send us in your car."

I had already told Luigi he might have the Sunday off. However, I answered, "I'll drive you out myself." There was a pause. Nicola was glaring at his young brother. "We could not think of troubling you, sir."

"It won't be any trouble."

He bit his lip, then, in a rather put-out tone, he said, "Very well."

*Next morning,
we found our
two young
friends bent
over shoeshine
boxes in the
public square*

The following afternoon we drove to the tiny picturesque village set high upon the hillside amidst sheltering chestnut groves, with a few pines on the upper slopes and a deep blue lake beneath. I imagined that our destination would be some humble dwelling. But, directed by Jacopo's shrill treble, we drew up at a large red-roofed villa, surrounded by a high stone wall. I could scarcely believe my eyes and before I could recover breath my two passengers had leapt nimbly from the car. "We shall not be long, sir. Perhaps only an hour. Maybe you'd like to go to the café in the village for a drink?" They disappeared beyond the corner of the wall.

When a few minutes had elapsed I followed. I found a side-entrance and, determinedly, rang the bell.

A pleasant-looking woman with a ruddy complexion and steel-rimmed spectacles appeared. I blinked as I saw that she was dressed in the white uniform of a trained nurse.

"I just brought two small boys here."

"Ah, yes." Her face lit up; she opened the door to admit me. "Nicola and Jacopo. I will take you up."

She led me through a cool tiled vestibule into the hospital – for hospital the villa had become. We traversed

a waxed and polished corridor between well-equipped wards. We went upstairs to a southern balcony which opened to a vista of the gardens and the lake. On the threshold of a little cubicle the nurse paused, put her finger to her lips and, with a smile, bade me look through the glass partition.

*The nurse
paused, put her
finger to her lips
and, with a
smile, bade me
look through the
glass partition*

The two boys were seated at the bedside of a girl of about 20 who, propped up on pillows, wearing a pretty lace jacket, was listening to their chatter, her eyes soft and tender. Despite the faint flush high upon her cheekbones and the queer inertness of her posture, one could discern at a glance her resemblance to her

brothers. A vase of wild flowers stood on her table, beside a dish of fruit and several books.

"Won't you go in?" the nurse murmured. "Lucia will be pleased to see you." I shook my head. I felt I could not bear to intrude upon this happy family party. But at the foot of the staircase I drew up and begged her to tell me all she knew about these boys.

She was eager to do so. They were, she explained, quite alone in the world, except for this sister, Lucia. Their father, a widower, a well-known singer at La Scala, had been killed in the early part of the war.

Shortly afterward a bomb had destroyed their home and thrown the three children onto the streets. They had always known a comfortable and cultured life – Lucia had herself been training as a singer – and they had suffered horribly from near starvation and exposure to the cold Veronese winter.

For months they had barely kept themselves alive in a sort of shelter they built with their own hands amidst the rubble. Then the German Elite Guard established headquarters in Verona and for three dreadful years ruled the city with ruthless severity. The boys grew to hate those harsh, unwanted masters and when the resistance movement began secretly to form they were among the first to join. It was not a matter of ‘playing war’. Their extreme youth and insignificant size, added to an intimate knowledge of the neighbouring hills, made them immensely valuable. They were used to carry messages to the forces of liberation and, more dangerous still, to ferret out information on the movements of the German troops.

The good nurse broke off, her eyes moist, then with even deeper feeling she went on. “I need not tell you how fine they were, these infants. How they went in the darkness, through the mountain passes, with letters in their shoes which might cause them to be shot. And when it was all over, and we had peace at last, they came back to their beloved sister. And they

found her suffering from tuberculosis of the spine, contracted during the miseries of the war.”

She paused, took a quick breath.

“Did they give up? I do not have to answer that question. They brought her here, persuaded us to take her into the hospital. In the 12 months she has been our patient she has made good progress. There is every hope that one day she will walk – and sing – again.

“Of course, everything is so difficult now, food so scarce and dear, we could not keep going unless we charged a fee. But every week, Lucia’s brothers have made their payment.” She added, simply, “I don’t know what they do, I do not ask. Work is scarce in Verona. But whatever it is, I know they do it well.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “They couldn’t do it better.”

I waited outside until the boys rejoined me, then drove them back to the city. They sat beside me, not speaking, in a mood of quiet contentment. For my part, I did not say a word – I knew they would prefer to feel that they had safely kept their secret. Yet this silent epic of youthful devotion had touched me deeply. War had not broken their spirit. And, if an untimely maturity had been forced upon them, at least they had accepted it with dignity and courage. Their selfless action brought a new nobility to human life, gave promise of a greater hope for human society. **R**





AUGUST 1969



What You're Missing When You're Not Listening

In our overstimulated daily lives,
we often shut out as much noise as we can.
But when you turn off the sound,
you tune out the world

BY JOHN KORD LAGEMANN



Our world is filled with sounds we never hear. The human auditory range is limited to begin with: if we could hear sounds lower than 20 vibrations per second, we would be driven mad by the rumblings and creakings of our muscles, intestines and heartbeats; every step we took would sound like an explosion. But even within our auditory range, we select, focus on, and pay attention to only a few sounds – and blot out the rest. We are so assaulted by sound that we continually ‘turn off’. But in the process, we shut out the glorious symphony of sound in which the living world is bathed.

Everything becomes more real when it’s heard as well as seen. It is, in fact, quite hard to really know a person by sight alone, without hearing their voice. And it is not just the sound of the voice that informs. Even the rhythm of footsteps reveals age and variations of mood – elation, depression, anger, joy. The sound-tormented city dweller who habitually turns off their audio loses a dimension of social reality. Some people, for example, possess the ability to enter a crowded room and from the sounds encountered know immediately the mood, pace and direction of the group assembled.

Everything that moves makes a sound, so all sounds are witnesses to

events. If touch is the most personal of senses, then hearing – which is a sort of touching at a distance – is the most social of the senses.

It is also the watchdog sense. Sounds warn us of happenings. Even as we sleep, the brain is alerted by certain key sounds. A mother wakes at the whimper of her baby. The average person is quickly roused by the sound of his own name.

Watchdog, stimulator, arouser – it is not surprising that modern urban man has turned down and even crippled this most stressful of senses. But hearing can also soothe and comfort. The snapping of logs in the fireplace, the gossipy whisper of a broom, the inquisitive wheeze of a drawer opening – all are comforting sounds. In a well-loved home, every chair produces a different, recognisable creak, every window a different click, groan or squeak. The kitchen by itself is a source of many pleasing sounds – the *clap-clap* of batter stirred in a crockery bowl, the chortle of simmering soup.

Most people would be surprised to discover how much the sense of hearing can be cultivated. At a friend’s house recently, my wife opened her purse and some coins spilled out, one after another, onto the bare floor. “Three quarters, two dimes, a nickel, and three pennies,” said our host as he came in from the next room. And, as an afterthought: “One of the quarters is silver.” He was right, down to the last penny.

"How did you do it?" we asked.

"Try it yourself," he said. We did, and with a little practice, we found it easy. On the way home, my wife and I took turns closing our eyes and listening to the sounds of our taxi on the wet street as they bounced off the cars parked along the kerb. From that alone we were able to tell small foreign cars from larger American cars. Games like this are one of the best ways to open up new realms of hearing experience.

Another benefit of honing your hearing is that extrasensory faculty that blind people call facial vision. More than 200 years ago, Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles

Darwin, reported a visit by a blind friend. "He walked into my room for the first time and, after speaking a few words, said, 'This room is about 22 feet long, 18 wide, and 12 high' – all of which he guessed by the ear with great accuracy."

Sound engineers call it ambience: the impression we all get in some degree from sound waves bouncing off walls, trees, even people. For a blind person to interpret the echoes effectively, he uses a tapping cane, preferably with a tip of metal, nylon, or other substance that produces a distinct, consistent sound. (Wood

doesn't work, because it creates a different sound wet than dry.) The metal noisemaker called a cricket is equally effective. Animals, both terrestrial and non-terrestrial, also use 'echolocation'. The bat, for example, emits a very high-pitched sound and picks up echoes from any obstacle, even as thin as a human hair.

The human ear is an amazing mechanism. Though its inner operating parts occupy less than a cubic inch, it can distinguish from 300,000 to 400,000 variations of tone and intensity. The loudest sound it can tolerate is a trillion times more intense than the faintest sounds it can pick up – the dropping of

the proverbial pin (or, if you prefer, the soft thud of falling snowflakes). When the eardrums vibrate in response to sound, the tiny piston-like stirrup bones of the middle ear amplify the vibrations. This motion is passed along to the chamber of the inner ear, which is filled with liquid and contains some 30,000 tiny hair cells. These fibres are made to bend, depending on the frequency of the vibration – shorter strands respond to higher wavelengths, longer strands to lower – and this movement is translated into nerve impulses and sent to the brain, which then, somehow, 'hears'.

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While we are still under the age of 20, most of us can hear tones as high as 20,000 cycles per second (CPS), about five times as high as the highest C on a piano. With age, the inner ear loses its elasticity. It is unusual for a person over 50 to hear well above 12,000 CPS. He can still function, of course, since most conversation is carried on within an octave or two of middle C, or about 260 CPS.

One remarkable quality of the human ear is its ability to pick out a specific sound or voice from a surrounding welter of sound, and to locate its position. The conductor Arturo Toscanini, rehearsing a symphony orchestra of almost 100 musicians, unerringly singled out the oboist who slurred a phrase. "I hear a mute somewhere on one of the second violins," he said another time in stopping a rehearsal. Sure enough, a second violinist far back on the stage discovered that he had failed to remove his mute.

We owe our ability to zero in on a particular sound to the fact that we have two ears. A sound to the right of us reaches the right ear perhaps .0001 second before it reaches the left. This tiny time lag is unconsciously perceived and allows us to localise the object in the direction of the ear

stimulated first. If you turn your head until the sound strikes both ears at once, the source is directly ahead. Try it sometime when you hear the distant approach of a car.

The sound you hear most often and with greatest interest is the sound of your own voice. You hear it not only through air vibrations that strike your eardrums but also through bone conduction – vibrations transmitted directly to the inner ear through your skull. When you chew on a stalk of celery, the loud crunching noise comes mainly through bone conduction. Such bone conduction explains why we hardly recog-

*The sound
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own voice*

nise a recording of our speech. Many of the low-frequency tones that seem to us to give our voices resonance and power are conducted to our ears through the skull; in a recording, they are missing, so our voices often strike us as thin and weak.

Alas, it's possible that hearing will atrophy even further in the future, as civilisation becomes busier. When too much is going on, we learn to ignore most of the sound around us, which means we also miss much information and sounds that could give us pleasure. That's too bad – because there is a wisdom in hearing. **R**

Personal Glimpses

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE LIVES OF THE FAMOUS

Pope John XXIII once took a dismayed glance at his own full frame and bulging ears, to conclude gaily: “O Lord, this man is going to be a disaster on television.”

NEWSWEEK, RD JUNE 1964



When paying a visit to George Bernard Shaw, a caller expressed surprise that the author had no flowers in his home.

“I thought,” he said, “you were fond of flowers.”

“I am,” Shaw retorted. “I’m very fond of children, too, but I don’t cut off their heads and stick them in pots around the house.”

BLANCHE PATCH, THIRTY YEARS
WITH G.B.S., RD AUGUST 1953

The late Queen Mary visited a hospital ward one day and paused at the bed of a little girl. She asked the child where she lived and the child said in Battersea, a poor district in London.

“Where do you live?” the girl asked, unaware of the rank of her visitor.

“Oh, just behind Gorringes

Department Store,” Queen Mary replied.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE,
RD JULY 1953

US composer George Gershwin, who was never happier that when he was playing his songs on the piano, reserved one unpublished little waltz tune for affairs of the heart.

“You’re the kind of girl who makes me feel like composing a song,” he would tell the enraptured lady of the moment, and lead her off to his suite.

We would then follow on tiptoe to hear him ‘compose’ the familiar tune for her. “It will be dedicated to you,” he would conclude soulfully.

BENNETT CERF IN THE SATURDAY REVIEW
TREASURY, RD AUGUST 1958





DECEMBER 1998



Reminiscences by the Kitchen Stove

Sometimes childhood's most
treasured memories are found
in the security of family

BY YOU JIN



Looking back on my childhood, my fondest memory is of sitting in the kitchen to watch my mother cook. We were then living in Ipoh, Malaysia. There was a depression going on after the [Second World] War. Dad was newly demobilised and struggled to make a living with his small wine shop. I was then almost six years old. My parents, my sister and two brothers and I all lived huddled together in a shabby wooden hut. Mum, who had lived a comfortable, well-to-do life, had now to worry about our daily bread.

Our kitchen was crude indeed. An earthen stove blackened by smoke forever greeted us with its round mouth. In one corner of the kitchen were stacked bundles of firewood. Every evening, Mum would sit on a low stool in the kitchen and chop the wood with a clumsy axe. She split each block into three or four thin pieces, shoved them under the stove and set them alight.

As the wood burned, it gave off a delicious aroma. Mum would fan the stove vigorously with a palm-leaf; the fire flared and the dry, hard wood softened into a golden glow. My mother would then put the heavy black wok on the stove and start her stir-fry. The whole kitchen soon became filled with sizzling sounds and mouth-watering smells. I would sit on one side, rapt in attention and in homely happiness.

Times were hard so my mother could only afford to make us ordinary dishes, such as vegetables with dried shrimp, fried eggs and onion, steamed pork with salted fish, and fried pork slices with greens. But for me, sitting at that humble wooden table with the whole family, and gobbling up the steamy rice and the simple food, each mouthful tasted like ambrosia.

Once in a while Mum cooked her favourite dish of steamed pork with taro, and that would be a big occasion indeed. She would arrange thin slices of taro and pork tidily in a round earthen pot, which had to sit patiently on the stove for three to four hours. The whole time that it was simmering, Mum would add firewood and continually fan the flames. Each time she did this, the ashes from the stove flew around and showered her.

By nature, she was a clean and tidy woman, but sitting by the fire at such moments her hair would be dishevelled, forehead beaded with sweat and her cheeks covered in grey ash. But her large limpid eyes shone with a beauty only a mother can have.

The sizzling pork was laid before us, the lean meat bright red, the fatty portions glistened like brilliant jewels. The sparkle filled our home. These wonderful meals my mother laboured so hard to prepare helped brightened our lives even as poverty and hard times weighed us down.

When I was eight, our whole family moved south to Singapore. Life didn't improve much as all six of us were forced to huddle in a rented room at Kallang. Living conditions were really difficult. Seven or eight families shared one big flat, and people squabbled and bickered constantly.

Mum would have none of it. She was a quiet person and had no appetite for gossip. She preferred to stick to her family behind closed doors, and when she had to stir out of the room she would go her own way, minding her own business.

She was determined not to let the crowded conditions prevent her from feeding her family properly. Cooking in the apartment was done not with firewood, but coal. During the hardest times, when we couldn't afford the big bags of fuel, Mum would take us by the hand and go to the coal shop to buy small quantities of the black cake. Walking home with it loosely wrapped in old paper, she would move slowly, restrained, as it seemed, by the shackles of our hard life.

Later, she would feed the coal into a small stove and fan a small flame into a raging fire. The black cakes greedily absorbed the tongues of fire and turned gaudy red. Perched

on her little stool, Mum would rotate the glowing coal around and around with a long iron stick until every piece took on a lurid hue. She then cooked for the family amid the steaming heat.

At midday, she would carefully prepare our lunch. Sitting on her low stool before the stove, she quietly prepared our meal. To me, her slender body looked like a paper cut-out figure mounted in an old frame. In the evening, her lone silhouette looked even more melancholy. While the coals glowed in the deepening dusk, Mum attended to the pot, seemingly lost in thought.

The whole kitchen soon became filled with sizzling sounds and mouth-watering smells

I'm sure she had much to worry about though she did not share her fears with us. Dad was working very hard at his construction business and was out day and night. Quite often, Mum cooked the food, shared a quick meal with us and kept our father's portion in a big bowl with a blue floral pattern, packed full and solid.

Home late in the evening, Dad was tired and hungry, his eyes bloodshot and cheeks visibly sunken. The night was deep, and it was not possible to start another fire to warm the food; so he would gulp down his cold dinner ravenously under a dim light,

surrounded by Mum and us kids. Still, despite these hardships, the whole room was warm with happiness. For Dad, the cold food must have tasted delicious as it was made with love.

During our first two years in Singapore, life was a struggle, but slowly our fortunes improved. In 1960, when I was ten years old, we moved into a new apartment at Kim Tian Road.

We now had a spacious kitchen, and most importantly, a gas stove. The first time I saw Mum light the stove, the circle of little flames appeared to me like a blue lotus flower, and as bewitchingly beautiful. For Mum, all those years of chopping firewood and carrying coal home, and tediously tending to wood fires and hot coals, were over. The spontaneous rush of gas which now burst forth at the turn of the knob must have come as a great relief.

Every day after cooking, my mother would scrub the stove meticulously to keep it shiny. Cooking became so much more pleasurable that she bought many new recipes and tried them with great gusto. Working by the gas stove, she no longer seemed distracted by distant thoughts, but was as gay as a butterfly.

Dad was a food lover by nature, and now that life became more settled his love for cooking began to re-emerge. Every Sunday, he and Mum went on a shopping spree at the food market and came home to practise their culinary art together. The dishes they laid on the table dazzled and delighted us. Meals which had been once a source of comfort now became one of joy.

In the years that followed, grey has slowly crept into my parents' hair, but so has a sense of contentment with their lives. They now live in a good-sized apartment, whose kitchen is equipped with a gas stove and oven and a microwave – all conveniences that

once seemed so unattainable.

The road that Mum and Dad travelled was an arduous one. Now, sitting on the verandah amidst the gorgeous flowers, they enjoy peace after those difficult years.

As for myself, I appreciate the comforts they have earned, but even more still, I remember the days of hardship when my mother lovingly laboured over a small stove with little more than a few sticks of wood, a pot and her imagination to feed us. We had little then, but the happiness my mother radiated from her kitchen stove made us feel we had everything. **R**

*The first time I
saw Mum light
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the circle of little
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to me like a blue
lotus flower*

Quotable Quotes

WISDOM THROUGH THE YEARS

Anger is a symptom, a way of cloaking and expressing feelings too awful to experience directly – hurt, bitterness, grief and, most of all, fear.

JOAN RIVERS, *RD July 1993*



Golf is a good walk spoiled.

MARK TWAIN,
RD December 1948

I HAVE NOTHING TO DECLARE BUT MY GENIUS.

OSCAR WILDE,
TO CUSTOMS OFFICIALS
UPON ARRIVING IN THE US,
RD March 1934



THEY WILL TELL YOU TO PROVE YOU ARE RIGHT; I TELL YOU TO TRY TO PROVE YOU ARE WRONG.

LOUIS PASTEUR, *RD March 1948*

WHAT I SAY IS, IF A MAN REALLY LIKES POTATOES, HE MUST BE A PRETTY DECENT SORT OF FELLOW.

A.A. MILNE,
RD July 1993



When you stretch the truth, watch out for the snapback.

BILL COPELAND, *RD May 1973*





APRIL 1968

How Rich Can You Be?

We may try with our fences to cage
the wind, or trap the songs of the birds.
But ownership is not that simple

BY JEAN BELL MOSLEY



We call our home Hollyhock Hill. It is on a gentle southern slope where myriads of these old-fashioned flowers stand like great multicoloured candlesticks lighting the back garden from May to September. I like to wander among them, smell their summery odour, feel the delicate tissue of their petals, and observe the fat bumblebees at work. It is one of my stations for meditation. Here and in other well-loved places – an old stump beneath a canopy of apple-tree branches, a bench beside a grey weathered shed – I think, ask questions and supply durable, home-made answers. Why are all floating things – a leaf, a silken, unanchored spiderweb, a bit of thistledown – so graceful? Is it because they have surrendered their will to a power greater than their own? Why are these sprouts coming up so vigorously around this dead stump? Because the force of life is stronger than the force of death.

In one corner I sit up high where I can see over rooftops to far fields, creeks and woods, and I ask, “Who owns this land? Who owns that hawk sailing over Kirchdoerfer’s cornfield, and those black and white cows grazing in Schonhoff’s pasture? Everyone and no one. I do. You do. Anyone can. For, in the real sense, who can own land? A cow? The colour and symmetry of a bluejay’s feathers? The

song of a cricket? The smoke from a chimney? Are not all these delights an expression of the Creator, just as the things are which grow on the land; just as the sky and the wind are as they interact to make things grow? A cow is a cow. A man is a man. A dandelion is a dandelion. But it is all one. Only as we absorb from, interact with, rub against, change into, appreciate to the fullest, do we own.

Some days when my thoughts hang like damp spiderwebs in mouldy cellars my answers do not come readily. A practical part of me will say, chidingly, “But you cannot walk into Schonhoff’s pasture and bring a cow home. You cannot sell one of Schonhoff’s cows.” But on other days when the mind goes beyond worldly logic I tell myself, “True. But I see the cows at morning, coming, freed, from the big dairy barn atop the hill, kicking their heels and switching their tails. I see them at noon, lying in cool shade; I see them at sunset, going home, sweet with milk. I hear their bawls. Pictures of them standing knee-deep in the creek hang on the walls of my mind. With all this, who can say I do not share in the ownership of these cows?”

I did not always feel this way about ownership. I thought in terms of legal papers, safes, possessions on pantry and cellar shelves. When we first came to Hollyhock Hill, with the deed in a strong metal box, it seemed good to erect fences – stout cedar posts with stretched woven wire.

For several years, I was only vaguely conscious of the great elms, oaks and hickories that swept the sky not over 200 feet away, the daisy fields that sloped up to the horizon, but, alas, outside our fences. When the redbird flew out of our yard into our neighbours' I was prone to dismiss its song and look and listen instead for one within our own boundaries. How green grew our grass! How straight and healthy our trees! How homey the smoke from our chimney!

THEN ONE SPRING, while transplanting something from the Outside into our yard so that we could own and thus enjoy it, I unearthed a rusty horseshoe. Another deeper thrust of the shovel brought up an Indian arrowhead. I felt that if we went deeper we would unearth, layer by layer, artefacts of all the people who had once owned our slope. Owned? For the first time, that word penetrated my consciousness. Suddenly I realised that someday other people would live here, and our land would be theirs. But the qualification came tardily, only temporarily and under a man-made covenant, as was our ownership and others' before us.

It was a painful thought at first, as if some silent thief had passed by and taken our treasures away. But at that moment a mockingbird in my neighbours' yard flew high in the air and came down in a dizzy cascade of song. And something waking in me

whispered, I own that mockingbird song. For does it not belong to anyone who has heard? How else can anyone own a birdsong?

I looked, really looked, at the elms and hickories to which I had paid scant attention before. They seemed to nod in the breeze, welcoming me back into the true world from which I had strayed. The sun glinted on a patch of leaves as if the golden notes of the bird's song had been blown there and tangled in the branches. And I saw now that we had tried, with our fences, to cage the wind, to selfishly trap a bit of the universe, and succeeded only in trapping ourselves.

Sitting there by the pile of fresh soil, I made a covenant. No longer would deeds and fences prevent me from owning the grace and sweep of neighbours' stately trees. No longer would birdsong cease to be mine if it emanated from outside our fences. The sunshine glinting on the back on some woolly sheep in the valley of Kashmir, half a world away, shines for me. May someone, walking half a world away, think on 'my' hollyhocks and know they bloom for him.

Now, far from the stump, the woodpile, or walking where the fences used to be, I ask occasionally, "How rich can you be?" And back comes a sturdy answer. In proportion as you refuse to limit yourself. In proportion as you perceive that all of God's creation belongs to all of His creatures. In proportion as you claim the universe! **R**





NOVEMBER 1999



A *Question* *of* *Trust*

My dad's life had ended,
but not our conversation

BY SHERRY HEMMAN HOGAN



When in treacherous waters the mariner trusts the reliable beam of the lighthouse to guide his passage. My dependable beacon was my father's handkerchief. He didn't care for fancy French silk or Italian lace and had no need for those with elaborately embroidered initials. Dad preferred plain white cotton, the best buy from the local shops.

The uses of Dad's handkerchief were innumerable. It was a white flag hanging from the car window when the old station wagon overheated on holidays, filled with five squabbling kids, a dog, a cat and worn-out parents. The handkerchief, ever ready for backseat disasters, sponged up melted ice cream and oozing egg salad sandwiches.

Amazing that a simple piece of cloth can evoke so many memories. It bound the wound of my favourite kitten after a close encounter with the neighbour's dog, then handled my sniffles too. It was Dad's amateur magician's prop for his disappearing coin trick. The first time I ever saw my dad cry, the crumpled cloth wiped his tears after he carried the lifeless body of his beloved German shepherd, Princess, to her grave.

As a teen distraught over a crush on a boy, my waterworks ceased only when Dad offered me his

handkerchief with the tender admonition, "Here, take mine. You never seem to have one when you need it."

I remember going to him when I was 20 just before leaving on my first solo adventure, a trip to Europe. As the big moment arrived, I was scared, not so sure I was ready to be independent after all. The tears came as I confronted leaving everything I knew: my family, my home, my friends and my boyfriend. "You'll see, this is going to be one of the best experiences of your life," Dad said reassuringly as he offered his familiar cotton square. "Trust me," he said with a wink.

Three years in France and Africa was, indeed, the greatest journey of my life. And upon returning, my first sight scanning through the throngs at the airport was Dad's white handkerchief waving over the crowd.

It would make many appearances in my life – never more movingly than when my mum wept into it tears of joy at the triumphant birth of my daughter, Shannon, following two miscarriages.

Some 12 years later, and newly divorced, quite a few handkerchief sessions with Dad were in order as my daughter and I faced a whole new life together. After heart-wrenching discussions at Mum and Dad's, my search for a tissue invariably ended with my father's familiar offer. Then, concerned about my going home to a dark house, my parents established

a routine for their peace of mind as well as mine. Within minutes of my arrival, I would always call to say, "Hi Dad. It's me. I'm home."

My father was then fighting his own battle, a 12-year war with prostate cancer. By Christmas 1997, the illness had taken over his body. Knowing that we could lose him any time, we did our best to make it a joyous occasion. But when asked what presents he needed, Dad could only say with a grin, "There's nothing I need where I'm going. Everything's provided for."

Still, we had to get him something. After discussions with my sisters and brother, I suggested handkerchiefs – he still kept a fresh one with him every day. I went to a boutique and bought some beautiful, expensive linen ones with the initial *R* for Robert, his first name, embroidered in black, red and silver. Then knowing my father, I went to a discount store to purchase a few of the cheap variety. At home I placed them in three different gift boxes.

For the first time in 55 years, my parents were separated, living in two constant-care rooms near each other in a retirement home. From his favourite chair, Dad opened the trio of gaily wrapped packages. "Well,

what do you know!" he said each time, giving us the impish smile we cherished. "Just what I needed."

Setting aside the elegantly initialled linens, he chose a bargain hanky and waved the familiar flag. "This is how I built that little nest egg for your mother," he said. "I'll only use the expensive ones for very important occasions."

Dad knew his time was short. As was his way, everything was prepared, including his obituary. Undaunted, he and I spent several evenings writing it together. On a stormy night in January, I brought him the final draft. While he reclined in his favourite chair, I be-

gan to read aloud. Although strong during all our discussions, I could no longer suppress my emotions looking into the eyes that had seen me through 45 years. The tears just would not stop.

With tremendous effort, he squeezed my hand. "I'm ready to move on. You know that. But look after your mother, OK?"

"You've...always been there for me, Dad," I barely choked out.

"And I always will be, just in a different way," he said. "Trust me."

I dug in to my handbag for a tissue. Smiling, Dad said gently, "I've got

I could no longer suppress my emotions looking into the eyes that had seen me through 45 years

lots of these – thanks to you. Now dry your tears and blow your nose, OK? A good, hard one.” He glanced out at the blustery weather. “You shouldn’t have stayed so late. Driving may be tricky. Why don’t you call me when you get in?”

During the ten-minute drive home, his words “trust me” echoed in my heart. He was the most trustworthy person I knew. If he said something, he meant it. I felt far more peaceful now, but still found my voice catching when I phoned him as soon as I arrived. “Hi, Dad. I’m home.” Would this be the last time he would hear those words from me?

It was. Dad passed away just ten days later. We knew he was ready.

In the weeks after the funeral, we did our best to stay strong for Mum. One of the most difficult chores was clearing out his room, which held so many reminders. My mum had no extra space in her room. So Dad’s chair found a home in my living room, where Shannon, now 18 years old, adopted it as her favourite spot to snuggle, nap and do homework. Her grandfather had been her hero too.

Eight weeks after Dad’s death, Friday, March 13, the permanence of such a major loss hit. This date,

gloomy for the superstitious, was always one of optimism for our family. My father was born on the 13th day of September in 1919, and he assured us from childhood that it was a lucky day.

This Friday the 13th, however, provided no reason to celebrate; Dad was no longer with us. Yes, I knew he was in a better place, but the father I could always rely on was gone.

*That’s when
I saw it. Out of
the corner of my
eye, a big square
of white peeked
from beneath
Dad’s chair*

Even the promise of spring, due to arrive in just seven days, seemed too much to hope for. Easter, the essence of rebirth, was only a month away, but I couldn’t even bring myself to unpack the decorations. I felt lifeless, as I had during other crises. And to whom had I gone then? Dad.

In tears, I called my sister. “Dad always helped me through things like this. He had the answers.”

“Talk to him, Sher,” she said gently. “I do all the time.”

I hung up, tears still streaming down my face. I wandered aimlessly around the living room and scrabbled in an empty box of tissues. Then I talked to him. “Oh, Dad. I know you’re in a better place. I have that faith, mostly because of you. But I miss you so much. And I just wish I knew that you’re all right.”

Silence. Nothing. I felt worse.

Sobbing uncontrollably, I could feel grief washing through my entire body. My hands turned icy cold, and I started to shake all over.

That's when I saw it. Out of the corner of my eye, a big square of white peeked from beneath Dad's chair. "What on earth is that?" I mumbled, impatient because I had just tidied the room that morning. Stooping to pick it up, I stared through the fog of tears. It was one of Dad's new handkerchiefs with the embroidered design. I clutched it, stroking the elegant black letter *R*.

I took a few deep breaths and tried to calm myself. My mind worked. *I clean this room every morning, I thought. And I vacuum the entire rug, moving his chair, twice a week. Where did this handkerchief come from?*

I felt silly. But when we'd emptied Dad's room, I had carefully explored that chair, collecting pens and paper clips and other odds and ends that had slipped between the seat and armrests.

Once in my living room, that chair had been lovingly cleaned. It had been bounced upon by my neighbours' grandkids and survived my daughter's slumber party with seven

teenage girls scrambling in and out of it throughout the night. So why had the handkerchief shown up now?

I paced throughout the house, shaking my head. This I could not explain.

"All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen." I could almost hear Dad quoting Emerson. And then his own words to me at Christmas came back: "I'll only use the expensive ones for very important occasions."

Gently tucking the embroidered cloth in my pocket with new resolve, I retrieved the Easter decorations: the bunnies, eggs and butterflies – all symbols of creation, new life and rebirth, the very promise of spring.

Yes, I could trust that spring would arrive – it always does. And I could trust the words of my father.

That handkerchief now had a treasured place on my desk. It's a reminder that perhaps some things in life are better left unexplained. Leaps of faith can be very good exercise for the healing heart.

As far as I was concerned, it was Dad's way of sending me a message. It was his way of saying, "Hi, Sher. It's me. I'm OK. I'm home." **R**



DEFT DEFINITION

RD JUNE 1952

College years: "The only holiday a boy gets between his mother and his wife." *FARM JOURNAL AND COUNTRY GENTLEMEN*

All in a Day's Work

HUMOUR ON THE JOB

Richard Bastow, of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, says he'd rather work with elephants than with chorus girls. "Elephants are more attentive, they don't argue with you and they don't expect you to take them out to dinner after the show."

EARL WILSON, RD JULY 1976



1970s

Each desk in the office had its 'In' and 'Out' baskets. On one desk, however, the baskets were marked 'Easy come' and 'Easy go'.

That desk belonged to the boss's son.

JOE RYAN, RD JULY 1976

My brother Dave, a law student, announced that he had acquired a holiday job as a petroleum transfer engineer. It sounded great – until we found that his position was at a local service station.

CLIFF BOWEN, RD NOVEMBER 1976

One weekend I developed an eye irritation, and went to a hospital

emergency department. After a doctor had examined me, a nurse appeared holding a needle all set for an injection.

"Would you please bare your hip, Sir?" she requested.

I complied, but asked her why the injection was so far removed from the affected area.

"Sir," the nurse said with a smile, "this injection, like the cost of living, will rise and get you where it hurts."

RON REID, RD NOVEMBER 1976

Concern had been high in California over the prolonged

drought. One suggestion was provided by a Los Angeles petstore owner who put the following sign in front of a window full of adorable puppies: “Save water. Take home a plate licker.”

DAVID DIXON, RD OCTOBER 1977

Seeking a job in journalism, a resourceful young man sent newspaper editors a printed notice headlined: ‘I’ve Been on Your Payroll for the Last Seven Months!’

He explained that they had been subsidising his unemployment benefits through their taxes, and concluded: “As long as you’re paying me anyway, I might as well be working for you.”

It worked. A daily newspaper hired him.

WALTER MOSSBERG, RD MAY 1979

1980s

When a new office building was under construction, workers set up barricades and warning signs to protect the public. One day an arrow-shaped sign appeared with the words: PEDESTRIAN DETOUR. Put up by a local shopkeeper, it pointed straight into his premises.

G. PERKINS, RD SEPTEMBER 1987

My secretary complied with my request to outline her job. I closed my door one morning and sat back to read her list: “1. Types and files. 2. Answers phone. 3. Greets visitors.” The list went on, but it was the last item that stopped me: “Reads minds.”

“Glenda...” I yelled.

“You know I do.”

ROGER BRITT, RD SEPTEMBER 1982

I am a flight instructor, and one of my students was having great trouble landing the aircraft. He could not judge how close to the ground he should be before getting the plane’s nose up.

Strangely enough, during our first night-time lesson he did an excellent job. On each approach, just when I thought I was going to have to take over, he would pull back on the stick and make a beautiful landing.

I asked him what visual reference he was using, since there were few clues in the dark. He told me that he just aimed for the end-of-the-runway lights. Then he waited until I stiffened in my seat, whereupon he’d pull back and land.

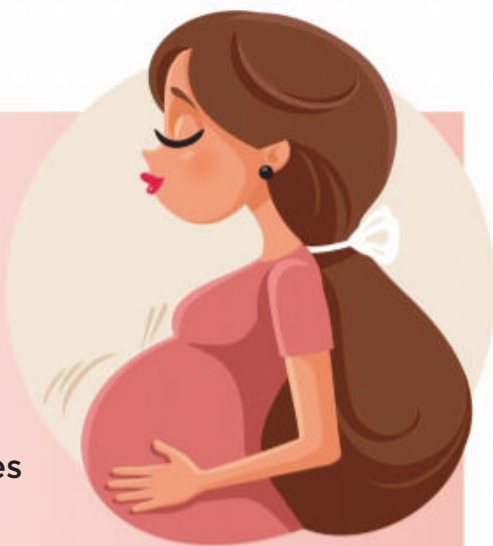
A. PAUL BELL, RD NOVEMBER 1990



An expectant father who works for our bank was waiting nervously for a call from his wife. She could go into labour at any time, and he was trying to concentrate on his job. Our manager approached him and asked how his wife was doing.

“The transactions are now 15 minutes apart,” he replied.

VANY VILA, RD NOVEMBER 1990



A TV news anchorwoman claimed that off-camera and without make-up she wouldn't be recognised. To avoid attracting attention in her neighbourhood, she asked her children not to tell people what she does when she is away from home.

One day she overheard her son reply to a question about her work: “I can't tell. I just know she gets all dressed up and goes out at night.”

MAGGIE WHITE, RD SEPTEMBER 1981

My wife and I enjoyed our warm wood-burning stove, but bringing the logs up from the garage proved to be too much for we octogenarians. Recalling that dumbwaiters had once been used to convey meals from one floor to another, we agreed that something like that could easily lift a few chunks of wood.

We ran an ad in the local newspaper: “Wanted dumbwaiter – the kind used to transport meals from a lower to an upper floor. Condition not important but must be restorable.”

The result? No dumbwaiter, but three people called – two requesting an interview, and the third to ask if this would be permanent and what were the wages. **PAUL BOHNE**, RD JULY 1986

When some new tax laws were passed, my brother, an accountant, attended a seminar on them. One man had a question. “I'm sorry,” he began, “but I'm thoroughly confused.”

“Good,” answered the speaker. “That means you've been paying attention.”

DIANE REYNOLDS, RD SEPTEMBER 1987

1990s

A woman came into the clothing shop where I work, seeking an outfit to make her look youthful for her 40th high school reunion. While she tried on dress after dress, several school girls came into the fitting room with selections for their formal dance party.

“This dress makes me look 40 years old,” one of the girls remarked. My other customer poked her head out from her cubicle and said, “Let me have it. That’s just what I’m looking for!”

ALICE CARDELLA, RD SEPTEMBER 1994

A man was selling his home and hired me to repair a hole in the wall he had made years earlier for extra storage. I patched the area and painted it so that there was no sign a hole had ever been there.

That night I got a call from the

client thanking me for the excellent work. Then he asked if I could come back and perform the same job the next day. He had forgotten to tell me that his cat always hid in the storage area. **ROBERT SIDNEY, RD** FEBRUARY 1997

2000s

A friend of mine is a police officer in the dog squad. One night, he was dispatched to the scene of a possible burglary and discovered the back door of a building ajar.

He let the dog out of his car and commanded it to enter and seek.

The dog lunged through the doorway, then froze and backed out. My friend was puzzled until he investigated further. Then he noticed the sign on the building: ‘Veterinary surgery.’

ELIZABETH BENNETT, RD FEBRUARY 2002

Waiting for my order in a coffeeshop, I heard one of the workers say, “Look, here comes the grand non-fat latte.”

His colleague replied, “Yeah and right behind him is a café mocha.”

Each of the customers ordered the predicted beverages, and I was impressed that the workers knew their customers’ habits. But I was less sure when I realised that one of them had said when I walked in the door: “Here comes the tall drip.”

JAMES M. MORTON, RD JUNE 2000







JUNE 1989



From Street Kids to Royal Knights

How a caring teacher and the noble
game of chess changed lives

BY JO COUDERT



A whoosh of a flame startled teacher Bill Hall as he walked into his classroom. Whirling around, he saw 15-year-old Jose Tavaréz holding a lighter to a spray can of deodorant. “Make *beuno* blowtorch,” the Puerto Rican teenager was explaining to a classmate. Confiscating the can, Hall also broke up an arm-wrestling bout between a Pakistani and an Ecuadorian boy and gestured to Sze Wai Chen, newly arrived from Hong Kong, to put away his Chinese newspaper.

Sze Wai, age 13, pointed to the chess set Hall was carrying: “How say English?”

“Do you play?” Hall asked. Sze Wai shook his head no. Hall wondered if the student had understood the question.

Recently transferred to J.H.S. 99, a junior high school in New York City’s East Harlem, Hall taught English as a second language, but he was not having much success with these kids. They were all troublemakers, some guilty of chronic truancy, vandalism and thievery. Most had an attention span measurable only in milliseconds.

Sze Wai’s interest in the chess set was the first flicker of curiosity from any of them. Hoping to reach these kids any way he could, Hall, a veteran teacher of 24 years, opened the board and set out the pieces. “Chess

is a war game,” he began, “a fight between two people, like boxing or wrestling.” As he held up each chess piece, he wrote the English name on the blackboard. The class became quiet.

“If any of you guys want to learn how to play,” Hall said, “come around after school today.”

At three o’clock, when prime mischief-makers Tony Pagan and Jose Tavaréz slouched in, Hall felt a wave of apprehension. *Together these guys could take me*, he thought. But the teenagers never looked up from the chessboard as Hall described the strategic importance of controlling the board’s centre.

At the end of the session Pagan mumbled, “Heavy, man.”

“Cool,” echoed Tavaréz. “Now we chess players.”

“No,” Hall corrected him. “Now you know how the pieces move.”

To Hall’s surprise, the two boys were back the next afternoon, along with Jose Luis Ortiz and Javier Montano. Tavaréz paired off against Pagan and immediately moved to control the centre. *The school must have been mistaken in labelling him an underachiever*, Hall thought.

Soon, Sze Wai Chen and two Pakistani brothers, Bashart and Zia Chaudhry, joined in. As the group grew, Hall began giving up his lunch hours and Saturday mornings to teach the basics of the game and supervise play.

BOOK LEARNING

Fellow teachers told him he was a sucker. "You're wasting your time," said one. "These kids haven't got the brains to come in out of the rain."

"Why not play a game with them?" challenged Hall. When the teacher showed up, Pagan creamed him. "Maybe the problem with teaching these kids is our low expectations of them," Hall said.

The day Pagan checkmated Hall himself, the teacher sat back and whistled. "Hey, you guys are getting good!" Pagan grinned with pride. "You teach us more?" one of boys asked anxiously. "You teach us traps and sacrifices?"

"If you want to learn," Hall said, "you'll have to read the chess books."

"In English?" one groaned.

"If what we need to know is in English, we'll read English," Pagan announced firmly.

The boys' comprehension and vocabulary soon began to improve. When a science teacher remarked on Tavaréz's heightened concentration, the teenager explained the change: "I used to give up if I didn't understand. But I don't do that anymore, because if you give up on the chessboard, you're dead."

"I used to give up if I didn't understand. Not anymore. If you give up on the chessboard, you're dead"

One Saturday night Hall crammed his Volkswagen with kids and took them to a New York chess club. "Get those street punks out of here," an old-timer growled. Montano stepped forward. "Sir," he said, "we'd appreciate it if you'd play with us. We need the competition."

Grudgingly, the old-timer took him on. When Montano made a move that exposed his queen, the old-timer waved forgivingly.

"You don't want to do that, boy. Take it back."

Montano shook his head. "Mr Hall says if we make mistakes, we have to take the consequences."

With his queen duly captured, the boy made two more moves and checkmated his opponent. "You fell for a trap that's 200 years old," Montano said gravely. "You'll find it in a book called *The Art of Checkmate*."

GENTLEMEN'S HANDSHAKE

Hall considered entering the boys in the 1986 New York City Interscholastic Chess League Spring Tournament, even though they'd been playing only for months.

"Don't," advised the principal of J.H.S. 99. "They'll get whipped by one of the private schools, and

the self-esteem and self-confidence chess has given them will be destroyed.”

But the boys were not worried. “Who says we’re gonna lose, man?” Ortiz demanded. “We’re goin’.”

How can I take such a ragged-looking bunch to a tournament? thought Hall. *They need uniforms – and a team name.*

Since chess is known as the royal game and knights represent the gentlemen warriors, Hall ordered a dozen red T-shirts emblazoned ‘ROYAL KNIGHTS – J.H.S.99’.

He wondered if the boys might refuse to wear anything so square. He need not have worried.

Moreover, within a few days, he noticed that their tough-guy street mannerisms were disappearing. They asked Hall to show them the proper way to shake hands.

“We’re gonna win,” they said. “But in case we don’t, we gotta know how to lose like gentlemen.”

Ortiz won first place in the individual competition, Montano second place among seventh graders. Even the boys who had been defeated were exultant. They were the Royal Knights now, and a win for one was a win for all.

STREET MOVES

By now the New York papers, delighted to have a story out of East Harlem that wasn’t about drugs or violence, had made the boys local celebrities. And Faneuil Adams, a retired Mobil Oil executive, offered to finance the team’s trip to Syracuse in New York State to play in the 1986 state tournament. But the boys refused to go.

Hall was stunned, until he realised that the Royal Knights were frightened – not of competing, but of not knowing how to handle themselves in hotels, trains and restaurants.

“OK,” he said, “forget Syracuse. But let’s celebrate this win. I’m

taking the team to dinner.”

At the restaurant, Hall began musing aloud over the menu. “I see we get a choice of a first course: soup or fruit cup. I don’t want to eat too much because then comes the main course, over on this side of the menu...” The boys, busy watching which fork Hall used and how he cut his meat, left most of the conversation to their teacher, who spoke of places he’d been, trains he’d taken, and hotels he’d stayed at. A few days later Pagan announced the team had decided it might be possible to go to the tournament after all.

They turned up carrying their belongings in shopping bags and cardboard suitcases tied with rope

At the station they turned up carrying their belongings in shopping bags and cardboard suitcases tied with rope. One boy's jeans were out at the knees, another's sneakers were ripped and flopping. Hall took them across the street to a clothing store and bought them replacements.

On the train, the Knights set up their chess sets and began practising. Soon they had an audience. "East Harlem, eh?" one man whispered to another. "I wonder how many are into drugs."

Pagan overheard him. "None of us," he said. "We're into chess."

At the tournament, Alexis Ortega had already clinched third place when Eduardo Santana began playing for fourth. It was a tense game. Suddenly Santana made a crazy move. Hall stiffened. But Tavaréz gave him an almost imperceptible wink that said, "It's a street move, man. Keep cool."

Santana's opponent hesitated, reached for a piece, pulled back. Finally he took the gambit, and Santana moved crisply, in a beautifully played end game and checkmate.

MANY THANKS

A few weeks later Hall was called to the principal's office. *Which team member is in trouble?* he wondered. The Knights had come to be known as his boys, and he was called in whenever there was a problem.

Entering the principal's office,

Hall found the Knights lined up in front of Rodríguez. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Is the whole team in trouble?" Eduardo Santana stepped forward, started bravely on the speech he'd memorised, and choked up as a plaque was handed to Hall.

"For Mr Hall," it read. "We hope that this plaque helps to show how much we appreciate what you have done for us. Many thanks from all of us. The Royal Knights of East Harlem."

A year-and-a-half after they first started playing, the Knights flew to California to compete in the 1987 National Junior High School Chess Tournament. Faneuil Adams again helped with the expenses. Not only did the Royal Knights come 17th out of 109 teams from 35 states, but by now they were beginning to act like seasoned travellers.

MOSCOW BOUND

Two of the Knights, Jose Lao and Sze Wai Chen, were later invited to the Manhattan Chess Club to play an exhibition game against Maya Chiburdanidze, the women's world chess champion from the Soviet Union. The two were among those holding out longest against Chiburdanidze's championship play, and afterwards Hall spotted the three of them talking together.

"Maya says we should go to the Soviet Union and play the kids there," reported Sze Wai. Hall was

speechless. The Knights would be the first American scholastic chess team ever to visit the Soviet Union. But Hall could already hear the chorus of people saying, You're crazy. Can't be done. Too expensive. *In addition, he thought, the school administration would probably veto the idea.*

He was wrong. So Hall continued rounding up corporate and private donations, and made the arrangements with Soviet chess officials. New York banking executive Bob Moore and his wife, Mimi, bought luggage for the boys, and an exclusive men's clothing store outfitted the team.

Meanwhile, the Knights urged Hall to impose an almost military discipline. When one boy didn't show up for a practice session, he was dropped from the team.

"Actions have consequences," Hall reminded him. "You've learnt that in chess, and it's true in life, too." The boy was reinstated, but only after he got permission from each teammate to return.

When the team arrived in Moscow, members of the Soviet Sports Committee met the boys and escorted them to their hotel for a

festive dinner. The next day, at the Central Chess Club, the team was surprised at the youthfulness of their opponents, who were only ten and 11 years old – and shocked when every Knight was quickly routed.

Back at the hotel, they sat in gloomy silence. "Look," Hall told them, "they start these kids when

they're five years old. Of course they're good. But now you know their style, and tomorrow they'll be overconfident. You'll do better."

"It will be dedicated to the teacher who taught us that the centre is really ourselves"

CONTROLLING THE CENTRE

The next morning, in a demonstration match against international grand

master E. Sveshnikov, Pagan finished in a draw. This lifted the team's spirits, and that afternoon, playing against Soviet youths, the Knights achieved a 50-50 split.

Later at one of Moscow's newer youth centres, the team was warned that the competition would be the stiffest yet. Even so, Hall was surprised when Tavarez emerged after only 15 minutes in the tournament room. "That sure was a quick loss," said Hall.

"Who lost?" asked Tavarez, beaming. "I won!" That night Bashart Choudhry got a draw against a

young Soviet champion, and the whole team celebrated. They had demonstrated to the Soviets, among the strongest scholastic chess players in the world, that the street-smart kids from East Harlem could control the centre.

"It isn't that winning's so important," Tavaréz explained to Hall. "It's proving you can win. I don't want to leave the board until I prove that the guy who beat me isn't indestructible."

How they've changed, Hall thought as he walked down the aisle of the plane on the trip home. They had grown into thoughtful young men willing to take responsibility and able to plan ahead.

That morning, one of the boys had teased Bashart Chaudhry about his intention of becoming a lawyer.

"Life is no different than chess," Chaudhry had said. "If you don't have a plan, you'll get beaten."

Hall dropped into the empty seat beside Pagan, who was writing in the journal he'd kept on the trip. "Maybe someday you'll write a novel about kids growing up in East Harlem," remarked Hall.

"Yeah. Remember what a pain I was?"

"Now you're talking about going to college," Hall marvelled. "It's great what chess has done for you."

"Chess has been good for us," Pagan agreed.

"But if I write that book, it won't be dedicated to chess. It'll be dedicated to the teacher who taught us the importance of controlling the centre – and that the centre is really ourselves." **R**



PICTURESQUE SPEECH AND PATTERN

RD JUNE 1952

A canyon filled to the brim with hush. **DR CHARLES S. HEMPSTEAD**

A briefcase full of responsibility. **UPTON SINCLAIR**

A bee was busily scolding a flower. **JOHN MOORE**

Candles wrestled with the darkness. **STEFAN ZWEIG**

The clock hands converged on 12, pinching out the
last minutes of the day. **JERRY MACMULLEN**

In the quiet dusk the houses were waiting to gather in their
families for the night. **VIRGINIA LEE**

Nimble as a spider. **SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER**





MAY 1956



The Curious Custom of Going Steady

A veteran observer says that teenagers
are missing something by pairing up
– but they don't agree

BY CAMERON SHIPP



Going steady, as I remember it in the North Carolina town where I was fetched up, was pretty much for grown folks. It meant that a girl was spoke for – object, matrimony. Thirty-five years ago, when I first began to look at girls with alarm, young males considered going steady ridiculous. We thought a boy who'd get trapped like that was making an old fool of himself.

How times have changed! Today little boys and girls of 12, as well as big boys and girls of 16, go steady as nonchalantly as we used to stick pig-tails in ink wells. They have implacable rules about it too. Their rites and ceremonies constitute a protocol as formal as a minuet.

Around my house, thickly populated by teenage people, some mine, I am known as 'Oh-Daddy-You-Don't-Understand'. But I pay attention and sometimes I catch on.

Take Emmie, 15, and gorgeous. She went to a prom the other night. I asked her about it. "Have fun? Dance with lots of boys?"

Emmie gave me a patient look.

"I danced with Jim."

"Every dance?"

"Naturally every dance. It was real neat."

This is how it goes. Many of today's young people not only dance together exclusively but go as 'steadily' as possible in every other way. My

research shows that there are several ways of doing this. There's going-steady-by-telephone, there's going steadily, just plain going steady – and 'going ape'. I will explain.

Take our friend Chuck up the street. He and his girl Marilyn are 13. Chuck trod a measure or so with Marilyn at dancing school and found her, unlike most girls, less detestable. "She smelled good," Chuck told me, "like bread."

Chuck walked Marilyn home from school one day. A week later she was wearing his ring on a chain around her neck. It is commonly accepted that they are going-steady-by-telephone. I asked Chuck when he saw his girl. "Oh, I holler 'Hi' in the hall at school."

"You don't call on her?"

"Heck, no!" Chuck replied, clearly alarmed by the suggestion.

"When do you talk?"

"Why, gee, on the telephone, of course. Every night at 7.30. She does my health-and-safety lesson for me."

Going steadily is more difficult to get at. As I dig it, Allen and Martha are going steadily. Allen takes Martha to all high-school affairs and to various birthday parties to which he is expected to fetch a date. Otherwise he ignores Martha, who is content with the arrangement. This is as far as either party wants to go.

Liza is a girl who goes ape – a phrase which means losing your head over something. The

something may be cars or Chinese food, a movie star or a boy. It is usually a boy. Liza went ape over Lester, who sits near her in Geometry I. Did she ask Lester to help her with her homework or drop some kind of figurative handkerchief? Of course not. She told Betty, who asked Lester's best friend if Lester liked Liza. She also told four other girls, who cooperated by teasing Lester about Liza. Suddenly victim of a concerted campaign, he became blazingly conscious of her, realised she was extraordinarily pretty – and certainly very intelligent to prefer him. They were going steady in no time at all.

*Going steady
is less a matter
of amorousness
than of
convenience
and tribal
custom*

Going steady – the full treatment – is the one with the taboos and rites. In a true case, a 16 year old has more obligations than an unemployed father of eight.

To begin with, he has to take the girl to every teenage function. This means transportation and, since the family car is not always available, he has to provide his own – usually a fifth-hand job. He has taught himself to be an expert mechanic in order to put it in shape. He also toils afternoons and Saturdays at some job to pay for the \$400 his car costs.

For dances he provides a corsage,

average price \$3.50. He pays \$2 for the dance ticket. He takes the girl out afterwards and feeds her. I talked with a kid we'll call Jackson, who said his total expenses for the senior prom ran to \$17.80. That isn't all. If Jackson wants to go steady with a real neat girl, he does well to earn a football letter. He puts this on

a white sweater which costs \$24 and the girl wears it. Jackson never gets to wear it at all. Between football, work and social obligations, Jackson must also be good at maths. He must call at Sally's house every night and explain her lessons in quadratics. Also, he must telephone at least once during the

afternoon or early evening.

Sally's obligations? Sally wears Jackson's ring on that chain around her neck. She is expected to wait after each class for Jackson to tote her books. She declines all dates with other boys. She beautifies herself for proms and parties. Sally has got it made. Her social life is a certainty.

I haven't mentioned love, for going steady often has little to do with romance. Sometimes it has, of course, but going steady is less a matter of amorousness than of convenience, tribal custom and social security. Am I being naïve? I think

not. Biology has always been with us. Boys and girls fall in love. But nothing new has been added to it by going steady.

One lady of 16 who sprawls a good deal at our house (not a daughter, the poorest possible source of information) explained a few things to me the other day: "It's like this: There aren't enough neat guys to go around. Oh, a girl doesn't demand a big wheel, but she doesn't want to bounce around between *queaks*, does she?" ('Queak' means - I think - what 'square' used to mean, only squarer.)

"So," my girl friend concluded thoughtfully, "going steady's a good thing. You get to know a boy real well when you have lifetime interests and go steady with him for maybe three months."

All told, I think they are good kids. Certainly they are better scrubbed and informed than the preceding generation. They are not overly sex-conscious. It is no longer considered square to make good grades. And a girl does not have to smoke, drink or neck to be popular - especially if she wants to go steady.

But there used to be another real neat way. I know today's kids would like it if they give it a chance.

In my well-spent youth nobody went steady. We paired off from time to time, but we also took care to circulate widely. You fetched a girl to a dance to show her off and to give her a good time rather than to hold her in your own arms all evening. It was your responsibility to start her off and see that she got cut in

on often enough to feel popular. That way, a girl might go to a dance where she didn't know a soul and wind up the belle of the ball.

A girl can't enjoy an experience like that today. This strikes me as a sadness and a shame. At least once, a lady of 16 ought to get a rush, enjoy the

triumph and tuck away a warm and tender memory she can smile over when she's a grandmother.

And a boy ought to know what it's like to see his girl competed for. It makes a man in his teens feel important.

But undoubtedly I'm an old relic of the past. The kids will only say, "Oh, Daddy, you don't understand!" **R**

A boy ought to know what it's like to see his girl competed for. It makes a man in his teens feel important

Cameron Shipp rose from a small-town newspaper reporter in North Carolina to one of the best-known publicists and authors in the country. He is known for his work on the US radio show *Father Knows Best*.

Personal Glimpses

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE LIVES OF THE FAMOUS

Houdini, the famous magician, was never too busy to compose a love letter to his wife, and from 1913 to the time of his death he wrote one of these letters every single day – many of them long compositions, none casual lines. If he was at home, he would hide them about the house; and for six months after his death Mrs Houdini continued at intervals to find these letters.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE, RD FEBRUARY 1938



Comedy actress Joan Blondell, who often played the wisecracking blonde, describes her method of using a timer to get out of the dumps: “I set the timer for six-and-a-half minutes to be lonely and 22 minutes to feel sorry for myself. And then when the bell rings I take a shower or a walk or a swim, or I cook something – and think about someone else.”

ROBERT DE ROOS,
RD DECEMBER 1969

Show-business people often get an exaggerated idea of their own importance, admits actor Mike

Farrell, who played the part of B.J Hunnicut on the hit television series *M*A*S*H*. It’s good to have people around, especially your family, to see yourself in the right perspective, he says.

“I was at my house being interviewed, and the reporter kept telling me how great I was,” Farrell recalls. “My head was beginning to swell and my chest puff out when I heard my little daughter calling me from the bathroom with: ‘Daddy, I’m finished. Come help me.’”

“It brought me back to ground zero immediately.”

BOB BARRY, W/5N, RD SEPTEMBER 1984





AUGUST 1991

Trapped Beneath a Blazing Tanker!

Surrounded by a wall of flames,
a young New Zealand girl put her last hope
in the pledge of a courageous firefighter

BY JAMES HUTCHISON



“Let’s go, Mum!” Shirley Young begged her mother. It was Thursday, August 9, 1990 – late-night shopping at Manukau City Shopping Centre in South Auckland. One of the highlights of the week for the 12-year-old Maori girl was to spend a few hours at New Zealand’s biggest mall with her aunt and cousin. Her mother Gaylene, a single parent struggling to improve her job prospects, appreciated having a few hours by herself to catch up on her studies.

Gaylene threw on a woollen cardigan against the evening chill and drove the trio to the mall in her sister’s white Cortina, stopping at the kerb on busy Wiri Station Road to drop them off. As Shirley headed across the car park to join the throng of shoppers she suddenly realised she didn’t have her purse. “Wait Mum!” she yelled, running back. “I forgot my money.” Shirley opened the passenger door and leaned in.

Further back along the busy road, Buddy Marsh shifted gears on his huge Scania tanker as he headed up the rise. The 40-tonne truck and trailer held more than 30,000 litres of petrol destined for a service station in central Auckland. A cautious driver, Marsh kept well to the left of the two-lane road but, as he neared the mall, a taxi pulled out of the car park, blocking his lane. Marsh swung his rig away. A glance in his mirrors showed the

trailer just cleared the front of the taxi. Then, as he looked ahead, Marsh gasped in horror. Not 20 metres away, directly in his path, was a stationary white car.

Marsh yanked on the steering wheel and hit the air brakes, locking up several of the 14 sets of wheels. The truck slammed into the rear of the car, spinning it round like a child’s toy and rupturing its fuel tank. Petrol sprayed both vehicles, igniting them instantly. Carried on by its massive momentum, the trailer jack-knifed, reared over the kerb and toppled on top of the wrecked car.

One second Gaylene Young was talking to her daughter; the next, she was whirling around in a vortex of crumpling metal. Gaylene sat stunned as flames poured into the car and a single, terrible thought rose in her mind. *Shirley! Where is she?* Gaylene groped frantically around in the darkness but the passenger seat was empty. *Thank God. She’s made it out of here.* An excruciating pain shot up her legs; her sneakers and track pants were on fire. Gaylene struggled to open the buckled doors, but they wouldn’t budge. “No!” she screamed, “I won’t die like this.”

“Brian!” Marsh called on his two-way radio to his shift mate Brian Dixon in another truck. “I’ve had an accident! I’m on fire! Call emergency services!”

Marsh jumped down and ran around the front of the tanker to the

burning car. Flames were licking the trailer's tanks. Worse, fuel was leaking from relief valves on the overturned trailer and spewing from a hole in its front compartment. The whole rig could blow.

Marsh reached the car just as bystander David Petera hauled Gaylene out and smothered her flaming clothes with his own body. He and other bystanders then carried her a safe distance away.

ABOVE THE HISS of escaping compressed air and the roaring fire, Marsh heard a voice calling "Mum! Mum!" At first he couldn't see anything. Then, as he searched underneath the toppled trailer, he saw a young, dark-haired girl trapped in a tiny space between a rear wheel and the chassis. "Mum!" she cried. "Mum!" Marsh grabbed her beneath the arms. "You'll be right. You're coming with me," he said. But he couldn't budge her: her lower body was pinned to the ground by the wheel assembly. "I want my mum!" she wailed.

Petera crawled in alongside and together they tried to find a way of freeing the girl. Through a gap in the chassis, Marsh could see a stream of fuel spilling from the tanker into the gutter. "We've got to get her out,

now!" he told Petera. "Try inching the truck forward," Petera suggested. As Marsh ran back to the cab, the interior was already ablaze. Jumping up into the burning seat, he reached forward through the flames to the melting dashboard and twisted the ignition key. To his amazement, the engine roared to life. He shifted it into

low gear and coaxed the rig gently forward. Shirley shrieked in pain. "It's no good," called Petera. "She's still trapped."

A wall of fire ran the length of the tanker, threatening to sweep around under the trailer where Shirley lay. Marsh grabbed a small fire extinguisher from the cab and ran

back, spraying it around the girl, hoping to buy a few precious seconds.

Then, from above the men, came a thunderous roar. An explosion tore a hole in one of the trailer's four fuel compartments. An immense fireball ballooned into the sky. Shoppers in the car park ran for their lives. Marsh and Petera, shielded by the tanker from the full force of the blast, crawled out. "There's a little girl trapped under the trailer," shouted Marsh.

"Let the firefighters handle it," a policeman replied. "Clear the area now!" Truck, trailer and car were now lost in a cauldron of fire. "That poor

Marsh could see a stream of fuel spilling from the tanker. "We've got to get her out, now!"

little girl,” Marsh said, holding his head in his hands. “She didn’t have a chance.”

With a blaze of sirens, a pump and rescue trucks from Manukau Station arrived. Immediately the vehicles stopped, senior firefighter Royd Kennedy had an armful of hose out of the locker and his partner, Mike Keys, was lugging foam containers down behind him. Driver Tod Penberthy was sprinting to connect the pump to the nearest hydrant. Waiting for the water, Kennedy saw his boots, fireproof overtrousers and the rubber on his breathing apparatus begin to singe. When they turned the hose on the fire, the heat was so intense that the water steamed away before it reached the flames.

Senior Station Officer John Hyland, in charge of the initial response, had never seen such potential for disaster in 19 years of fighting fires. The tanker was burning end to end, shooting flames 100 metres into the air. Petrol poured from holes and relief valves into a widening lake and a river of fire raced down the road into stormwater drains.

Only a few metres away were 550 other potential fires – the cars in the

crowded car park. Hyland knew of tankers that had blown up within minutes in a great fuel/air vapour conflagration – known to firefighters as BLEVE (Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapour Explosion), it reaches out for hundreds of metres and incinerates anything in its path. Only 100 metres from the burning tanker was the mall, packed with almost 20,000 late-night shoppers.

More fire crews arrived. “Concentrate on pushing the flames away from that tanker!” ordered Divisional Officer Ray Warby, who had arrived to take control. As if to underline his words, the fuel in another compartment exploded in a monstrous fireball, forcing Kennedy and his crew mates back 20 metres. The vehicles in

the car park around them had begun to melt, plastic bumpers and mirrors sagging, paint bubbling.

As the firefighters readied themselves for another assault, a long, high-pitched wail cut through the night. Kennedy’s station officer, Graham Haycock, dismissed it as the sound of expanding metal. When the eerie sound came again it raised the hair on the back of Kennedy’s neck. *I’ll be damned*, he thought. *It’s*



Truck, trailer, car and 12-year-old Shirley Young caught in the fire cauldron

coming from the tanker. Shielding his eyes, Kennedy peered into the glare, but saw only a flaming wall 50 metres high. Then, for a split second, the flames parted. From beneath the trailer he saw something waving. It was the hand of a child.

"Cover me!" Kennedy shouted to Haycock. He dropped his hose and ran straight into the inferno.

FOR TEN MINUTES little Shirley Young had been slowly roasting in a sea of fire. *It's hopeless, she told herself, no one can hear me in here.* Giddy with pain and petrol fumes, she felt her mind begin to drift and suddenly saw a vivid image of her grandfather and grand-uncle – both of whom had died years before. *They are guardian angels now, she thought. They'll be watching over me.* The idea gave her new strength. Straining to see through the wall of fire, Shirley glimpsed moving figures, *I've got to let them know I'm here!* Mustering every ounce of strength, she screamed louder than she had ever done in her life.

As Kennedy neared the flames, the heat hit them like a physical blow, stinging his face through his visor. Shielding his head with his gloved hands and fireproof jacket, he crawled under the trailer. Shirley was trying to hold herself up by clutching a cable over her head, but her hips and thighs were under the wheel assembly and her legs were twisted up, like a grasshopper's next to her chest.

"I'm scared. Please don't leave me," she wailed. Kennedy tucked his air cylinder under her shoulders to support her upper body. "Don't worry," he told her. "I'll stay, I promise you." Kennedy meant what he said; he had always made it a rule never to break promises to his own three kids, Ngaire, Rosamund and Raynal. "My name's Royd," he said. "We're in this together now, so we have to help each other." He reached into the tiny space and cradled the small body in his arms. Having fended for himself since his teens, he knew what it meant to be alone and afraid. "Is my mum alright?" Shirley asked. Kennedy replied: "She's a bit burned, but she got away. My mates will soon get us out, too."

The air was so thick with fumes that the two of them could barely breathe. Kennedy knew it would be only seconds before the vapour ignited.

Whoosh! The firefighter braced himself as the air exploded around them. *This is it, he thought. Now we're goners.* Shirley whimpered. Kennedy felt sick with helplessness as the flames washed over her. Then, for a moment, the fire drew back. "This is pretty rough, eh Shirley?" he said, unstrapping his helmet, "Put this on," *At least it may help save her face, he thought.* He cinched the strap tight under her chin and flipped down the visor. As he hunkered down he thought: *Where the hell is my cover?*

Haycock was running through the car park to the rest of their

team, yelling at the top of his voice. "Royd's under the tanker. Get that hose up here!" Struggling with the water-filled hose, they took no more than a minute to get within striking distance, but it seemed an eternity.

A second wave of fire washed over Kennedy and Shirley. They fought back hard, beating out the flames. Then more explosions rocked the trailer, and Kennedy's heart sank. *We don't have a chance now*, he thought. He looked down at the girl's tortured body. *I won't leave you. That I promise.* Then he wrapped his arms tightly round her and waited for the final surge of flame that would surely immolate them both.

Instead of fire, they were hit by an ice-cold waterfall. "My mates are here!" yelled Kennedy. Warby appeared through the curtain of water. "Don't worry, we'll get things moving," he told Kennedy, then he took quick stock. The two were shielded from the full force of the main fire above and beside them, but the burning wreckage of the car was in the way, hampering the firefighters' efforts to protect and rescue the pair.

Warby crawled out and ran to Peter Glass, an officer in charge of a rescue truck. "Get that girl out. I don't care how you do it as long as you do it fast!"

As Peter Brenchley and three other firefighters sprayed the life-giving water that kept fire away from Kennedy and Shirley, they were exposed to the full radiated heat of the main

tanker blaze. It gnawed through their multi-layered bunker coats as if they were tissue paper. Brenchley could feel the skin on his shoulders and arms blistering, and his gloves were seared through. But they didn't dare back off. If the spray wavered, fire would instantly sweep back over. Even changing crews was too risky.

Ironically, now Shirley and Kennedy began to shiver violently: 80 litres of freezing water were cascading over them each second. Soon they were in the first stages of hypothermia.

"I'll get someone to relieve you," Warby yelled to Kennedy. "No," Kennedy retorted. "I must stay with her. I made a promise."

Peter Glass brought his rescue vehicle in as close as he dared while a crewman sprinted to the car and hooked a winch cable to the wind-screen pillar. The winch was not powerful enough to drag the car out so they rigged it to the rescue truck's crane and, using it like a giant fishing rod, hauled the burning wreck away.

Assistant Commander Cliff Mears from the fire brigade headquarters, had set up a mobile command post and called in a fourth, then fifth alarm. Any vehicle in the city that could be useful was on its way to the scene. However, the firefighters were facing yet another potential catastrophe. Fed by tonnes of fuel, a torrent of fire was pouring into stormwater drains in the car park and on Wiri Station Road. But

what route did the drains take?

The answer came with a deafening explosion. A manhole cover blasted out of the ground at the main entrance of the mall, narrowly missing a woman and flinging her shopping trolley into the air. Rumbling underground explosions began lifting and blowing out manhole covers all over the complex. One-and-a-half kilometres away, stormwater drains emptying into the Puhinui Stream sparked five separate fires in the scrub on the stream's banks.

The entire shopping centre was now permeated with petrol fumes. "Evacuate the centre. Quick as you can," Mears ordered.

*Ironically,
they began to
shiver violently
and were in
the first
stages of
hypothermia*

BACK AT THE BURNING RIG, Warby approached Grant Pennycook, a paramedic from a waiting ambulance crew. "There must be something we can do to ease the girl's pain – do you think you could make it under there?" he asked.

Biting back his fear, Pennycook donned a bunker coat and helmet and headed into the inferno. As he crawled into the tiny space where Shirley and Kennedy lay, he realised he wouldn't have room to get an IV drip going. He considered administering a pain killer, but decided

against it: Shirley seemed to be coping and side effects such as suppression of her breathing might hamper the rescue operation. Trauma victims need to get to hospital within an hour of injury – dubbed the 'golden hour' by emergency services – to have a decent chance of survival. Crawling out, Pennycook was conscious

that timing was vital. Shirley had been under the tanker for more than 30 minutes. With her massive injuries, burns and now the cold, she could easily slip into shock and die.

Kennedy had been trying to take her mind off her predicament. "What do you watch on TV?" he asked, and

they talked for a while about her favourite shows. "If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?"

"Disneyland," she said emphatically, "I love Mickey Mouse." *This man's so brave*, she thought. *He could get out of here any time he wants. Grandad and Uncle Vincent must have sent him.*

Whenever she was startled by a sudden noise, Kennedy would explain what the firefighters were doing. "How bad am I hurt, Royd?" she asked. Kennedy tried to reassure her: "You've got a few broken bones and burns, but it's

marvellous what the doctors can do." Occasionally she would let out stifled moans. "It's OK, yell all you want," he encouraged. "Bite me if it helps."

The pain from the injuries to Shirley's lower body was becoming unbearable. She cried out, burying her hands in Kennedy's thick hair, pulling hard to ease her agony. As a firefighter, Kennedy had seen grown men with very little wrong with them blubbering like idiots, yet here was a 12-year-old girl who had not shed a single tear.

The steady flow of water wavered for an instant. *God no*, thought Kennedy, *the fire can't take us now*. Shirley barely managed to move her arms as the flames rolled in. Then the water came pouring back and Kennedy was horrified to see several layers of skin on her arms had slid down and bunched up round her wrists. "I'm still with you Shirley," he said. "Do you like horses?" he asked, desperate to get her talking again.

"I've never been on a horse."

"When we're out of here, I promise you a ride on my daughter's horse, Gilly."

As Kennedy talked, he kept a finger on Shirley's wrist to check her pulse. Now it was growing noticeably fainter and more erratic. She'd been trapped for nearly 40 minutes. *Dear God, how much more can she take?*

With the wreck out of the way, Peter Glass was trying to lift the trailer off the girl. He faced a knife-edge decision. A hydraulic jack would be

quicker, but it risked tilting the trailer, tipping out more fuel and incinerating the pair. "We'll use the airbags. They'll give a straight lift," Glass told his crew. Only 25 millimetres thick and made of rubber reinforced with steel, the 600-millimetre-square bags could each lift a railway wagon 60 centimetres. They slid one under each set of rear wheels and began feeding in compressed air. As the trailer moved they slipped in wooden blocks to keep it on an even keel.

Kennedy felt Shirley's pulse flutter and she closed her eyes, "Shirley, talk to me!" he pleaded. She rallied for a couple of moments but her pulse was so faint now he could barely feel it. She lifted her head and looked into his eyes. "If I don't make it, tell Mum I love her," she whispered.

"We're losing her, Warby," Kennedy shouted. "Throw me an Air Viva!" Kennedy put the mask of the portable resuscitator over Shirley's face and forced air into her lungs. She stirred a little and opened her eyes. "You tell your mum yourself," he scolded. "I promised I wouldn't leave you. Now don't you leave me!"

"I'll hang on," she murmured.

FROM HIS MOBILE CONTROL centre, Commander Mears had dispatched teams to chase down manhole fires. Firefighters gingerly lifted covers, careful not to cause a spark, and began pumping water down the drains to flush the fuel down to the harbour.

Others carried fuel vapour-detectors around the mall, opening all doors and vents in an attempt to blow fumes out of the shopping centre.

The burning rig was in the final approach path of Auckland International Airport and, with fireballs sending smoke and huge thermal currents into the sky, air-traffic control issued warnings to aircraft of the danger. There were now 27 appliances and 109 firefighters on the scene.

Peter Glass's rescue team had run into trouble. Part of the trailer was on soft ground, which was sodden from all the water, and the airbag under the wheel that was trapping Shirley was sinking into the mud instead of lifting. They blocked one more time and inflated the bag to its maximum, but the wheels had risen only ten centimetres. "We must have her out now," Warby told Glass.

Praying it would give them that extra few centimetres of lift without tipping the trailer, Glass shoved a small hydraulic ram under the chassis. He held his breath. The trailer lifted some more. Now he had a 15-centimetre gap between ground and wheels; it would have to be enough.

"Go for it!" he yelled. Kennedy gently, but quickly, untangled Shirley's legs from under the wheel; they were crushed so badly they were like jelly in his hands. Warby helped him juggle her crumpled body from its tiny prison. Then they carried her to the stretcher. Just before Shirley was

lifted into the waiting ambulance, she smiled at him and he bent down to kiss her on the cheek.

"You've done it, Shirley," he said. Then, overcome by fumes, shock and cold, he pitched forward into the arms of Divisional Officer Bruce Jones.

For Shirley, the ordeal continued. As the ambulance headed for hospital, Pennycook bathed her burns in saline solution and gave her nitrous oxide to relieve her pain. *If anyone deserves to live, he thought, it is this girl who has fought so hard.*

Back at the mall, firefighters were able to pour foam into the tanker. Before, it would have endangered Kennedy and the girl; now they quenched the burning rig in just three minutes.

When Hyland revisited the scene the next morning, he saw something that will haunt him for the rest of his life. For 70 metres the top layer of tar on the road had burnt away, in places down to bare gravel – except for a patch the size of a kitchen table that was lightly scorched by fire. This was where Shirley had been lying.

"It was as if the devil was determined to take that girl," Haycock said later, "and when she was snatched away, he just gave up."

AT MIDDLEMORE HOSPITAL a team of surgeons worked through the night on Shirley. Orthopaedic specialists set her fractures and implanted a pin in her crushed right leg. Burns

specialists saved what they could of the charred flesh on her legs. In another wing of the hospital, her mother lay with burns over 20 per cent of her body.

Four hours after the crash, the firefighters finally had the situation under control. It would be the next day before fuel vapour levels in the shopping centre and stormwater drains were down to a safe level.

Royd Kennedy finished his shift. He called his wife, Rosemary, and told her to put on bacon and eggs, and mounted his Harley Davidson to ride home in the first pink light of dawn. Throwing caution to the winds, he opened the throttle wide. *If a cop pulls me over, he smiled to himself, I've got a good story to tell.*

The surgeons did all they could. But the shock to Shirley's young body had been massive and trauma care had come very late, they told her family. "You must be ready for the worst."

For two weeks Shirley lay in intensive care. With tubes in her throat, she couldn't talk for the first few days. But, drifting in and out of sedated sleep, she scrawled a note: "I love you, Mummy." Five days after

the accident they wheeled Gaylene into Shirley's ward. Mother and daughter held hands and wept with happiness.

SHIRLEY SLOWLY RECOVERED and began a series of painful skin grafts to her legs. Orthopaedic surgeons found the right calf muscle too badly damaged to repair and decided to amputate her leg below the knee.

Firefighters have an unwritten rule never to visit victims in hospital in case they get too involved and lose judgement on the job. But Kennedy visited Shirley often, eating her chocolates and writing on her chart, "This kid is far too noisy."

They had forged a special friendship in the heat of the terrifying fire. "She's a miracle child," says Kennedy. "I had guardian angels watching over me," explains Shirley. On January 19, Kennedy kept another promise and took Shirley for a ride on Gilly.

Kennedy's heroism generated a flood of letters from well-wishers. His favourite is a card that was made by three eight-year-old girls. It says simply: "You are the greatest fireman ever." **R**



After she had sufficiently recovered, Shirley got her promised ride on Gilly

"It was the worst hour of my life"

August 2018 marked 28 years since New Zealander Royd Kennedy, 64, bravely saved a little girl's life

“ I vividly remember the terrifying explosions of the biggest fire of my life, and seeing a little hand amidst it all. A voice screamed, “Help me!” I ran into the fire and found a girl with terrified eyes, like saucers.

Following protocol I should never have gone in, but I couldn't have lived with myself if I'd left her alone to die. She was looking into my eyes with a desperate hope.

There's a fireman's code that you don't get involved emotionally with people from incidents. But this one was different. It was incredible we were both alive. When Shirley was well enough, we had a big celebration with her whole family. They presented me with a jade pendant that they had cut in two:

one half for Shirley and the other for me. It is still one of my most treasured possessions.

Shirley and I became good friends and we still check in with each other. Seeing her happily married with three kids of her own, and living with her mum, is fantastic.

As for me, my life changed forever. I might have come out without a scratch, but I collapsed from the strain. There was enormous pressure on me to be a 'hero' under

intense media scrutiny. I was 36 and just a normal bloke, but suddenly everyone wanted a piece of me. I had no training about how to handle the situation.

To get a break I took a job for a year with the United Nations and worked in Bosnia. But it was still just too much pressure. I stopped socialising and became a recluse. My marriage fell apart. Eventually I moved to Australia to start a new life with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, where I still serve as a frontline fire officer.

I am retiring in June 2019 after 44 years of firefighting and emergency service work. I'm a bit greyer, but that's life. More importantly, I'm still here, and so is Shirley.

”

AS TOLD TO
KATHY BUCHANAN





Quotable Quotes

WISDOM THROUGH THE YEARS

*Kind words can be easy
to speak, but their
echoes are truly endless.*

MOTHER TERESA, RD February 1987



**You're only
given a little
spark of
madness.
You mustn't
lose it.**

ROBIN WILLIAMS,
RD September 2002

**EVERY
PERSON IS
A FOOL IN
SOMEBODY'S
OPINION.**

SPANISH PROVERB,
RD July 1998

**A fashion ten years
before its time is
indecent. Ten years
after its time it is
hideous. After a century
it becomes romantic.**

JAMES LAVER, RD April 1965

**THE SOONER I NEVER
SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN,
THE BETTER IT WILL
BE FOR BOTH OF US
WHEN WE MEET.**

IRISH SAYING, RD July 1939

*As a nation we are
dedicated to keeping
physically fit – and
parking as close to the
stadium as possible.*

BILL VAUGHN,
RD December 1966



**I never lose
sight of the
fact that just
being is fun.**

**KATHARINE
HEPBURN**,
RD October 1982

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